

The Puppeteer and the Marionette

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/16494575) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/16494575>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Alana Bloom/Margot Verger
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham , Alana Bloom , Bedelia Du Maurier , Mrs. Komeda (Hannibal) , Abigail Hobbs , Original Characters , Franklyn Froideveaux
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics , Knotting , Hurt/Comfort , Angst with a Happy Ending , Top Hannibal Lecter , Bottom Hannibal Lecter , Top Will Graham , Bottom Will Graham , Grooming , Flashbacks , Masturbation , Phone Sex , Scent Marking , Scent Kink , Scenting , Possessive Behavior , Jealousy , Mating Bond , Alpha/Alpha , Unsafe Sex , Creampie , Outdoor Sex , Marriage Proposal , Biting , Blood Kink , Canon-Typical Violence , Murder , Murder Husbands , Will Graham is a Cannibal , Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper , Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal , Will Graham is a Tease , Will is a Mess , Love Letters , Sequel , Anxiety , Anxiety Disorder , Mating Cycles/In Heat , Stalking , Hallucinations , Hunting , Chasing , Sex in the woods , Frottage , Switching , Implied/Referenced Self-Harm , Alpha Hannibal Lecter , Alpha Will Graham
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Daydreamer and the Shadow Man
Stats:	Published: 2018-11-02 Words: 32,924 Chapters: 3/3

The Puppeteer and the Marionette

by [HigherMagic](#)

Summary

Sequel to "Daydreamer and the Shadow Man". A year into their relationship, Will thought he had everything figured out. He believed, truly, that there was nothing he could want, with Hannibal by his side. But believing something doesn't make it true, and walls and fortifications mean nothing when the hearth is already destroyed. It's up to him, and Hannibal, to cement themselves as equals, as unbreakable, or risk everything falling apart.

Notes

"Hey Rowan, how's Nano going?"

/shifty eyes....this isn't what I planned to write for it, but a solid 18 hours over two days, well, the heart wants what it wants, right?

This is the sequel to "Daydreamer and the Shadow Man" and it references a lot of things in that fic, so if you haven't read it, I would highly recommend reading that fic first (even chapter six, though if it has kinks in there that you don't want to read you just need to know Will goes through rut towards the end of it).

I really, really loved writing this: I think it's important, given the imbalance of the premise of Will's and Hannibal's relationship, to show Will gaining that control back, to being equals to Hannibal in his own eyes.

I won't lie, I made myself pretty emotional writing this. Shadow Man is such an important 'verse to me, and I love writing every word of it I manage. There is angst, there is a LOT of angst, but also a very happy ending, I promise!

Enjoy!

Chapter 1

Will has a lot of time to himself nowadays. Without Jack hounding him about cases or borderline-begging him to open his eyes and see what the newest monster has left for them to dissect, and with Alana happily married now and travelling the world on her honeymoon, the limits of Will's socialization begin and end with Hannibal.

He doesn't notice it when his mate is with him – of course not. His mate is wonderful, and fills up every crevice and space that Will offers him just by being there. His voice, his smile, the warmth of him soothes Will's itching teeth and calms the heat behind his eyes even in the worst of moods. And Hannibal visits him often – whenever he can, really, though after their own period of bliss they'd had to concede that the two-hour commutes to and from Baltimore and Will's house were not sustainable.

Will is certain Hannibal would have continued, if he'd asked, but he'd seen the growing darkness under his mate's eyes, noted Hannibal's lethargy, how he grew quiet during their meals, sometimes, his exhausted brain providing little in the way of conversation, though he'd tried.

So it is this, now – the weekends are Will's. Hannibal comes to him on Thursday night and leaves Monday morning. If Will is so inclined, he may drive to Hannibal's house that Monday as well, or some other night during the week for dinner and company, but he knows he cannot reasonably leave his dogs for too long, lest they feel compelled to wander or run out of food in their bowls.

It is blissful. Will doesn't look forward to the nights when his bed feels cold and barren, but he can bear them, for he knows Hannibal is aching for him just as badly. Knows, in his stomach, in his heart, that his mate is looking to the stars and wishing he could join Will there.

Will borrows Deborah and Malcolm's lawnmower every now and again, forgoing the lawn service he first entertained the idea of hiring. Mowing the lawn is a domestic task he enjoys, as the loud bray of the machine fills his head and he immerses himself in the scent of cut grass, watches his dogs nose at nettles and explore the yard. Hannibal has taken to massaging Will's shoulder at night, easing it from its tendency to lock up and grow sore after so much labor. It is a Thursday, so Will knows should his body protest, it will not suffer long.

He looks up as the shadow of a new car casts itself, touching his feet, and smiles when he sees Malcolm drive up beside the house, killing the engine. At Hannibal's encouragement he has done his best to become friendly with his neighbors – if nothing else, it helps gentle his profile from loner psychopath, and their favor, as well as Elijah's and his family's, garners trust with the rest of the residents of the town.

Malcolm waves at him and Will waves back, shutting off the lawnmower and dragging it behind him towards the back of the house. Winston and Addy bark, running up to Malcolm in happy greeting and the other Alpha smiles, kneeling down to give them their usual pets.

"Morning, Will," he greets, dusting his hands off as he stands. Will claps his hand against the other man's forearm, letting him shake, before his touch falls.

"Morning," Will replies. Malcolm smiles at him, before his eyes fall to the newest bite mark Hannibal placed to his neck. The first one, the mating mark, has faded, becoming a silvery scar, but Hannibal is liberal with his mouth and Will an eager canvas, wishing for his mate's bruising hands and savage teeth whenever they fall together in the darkness. "What's up?" Will asks, and tilts his head, drawing Malcolm's eyes again.

Malcolm clears his throat, shifting his weight. "Well, the annual fall festival is coming up," he says, his expression gentling into a kind smile Will recognizes well by this point. "And usually the town does a whole thing. Food stands, little rides for the kids, you know."

Will nods, recalling seeing signs for such. He had just moved in just past the festival dates last year, and had missed it.

"Debbie and I run the wagon ride," Malcolm continues. "And we could use an extra set of hands. I was hoping to draft you to the cause." He pauses. "Your mate, too, if you're both willing."

Will blinks, surprised by the words. He clears his throat and runs his hand over the back of his neck. "Um." He winces, looking down at his feet. Truthfully the thought of so many people, so much vibrant *energy* – for he's sure the whole town will gather, all of them, eager to scent and see the fresh meat of the weird Alpha who bought the murder house – sets his teeth on edge.

But he cannot think of a single reason to refuse. And he's sure, if Hannibal was here now, he would encourage Will to do it. *Socialization*. And Hannibal is certainly social, if his talks of dinner parties and schmoozing with his friends at the Opera is any indication. He has mentioned, more than once, that Will may join him if he desires. Will doesn't know if he has the stomach for so much blue blood.

"Sure," he says, weak in the face of Malcolm's open anticipation. The other Alpha grins widely. "He's coming over tonight; I can see if he wants to join."

"Excellent!" Malcolm says. "It's a real treat, Will, I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself. And your mate..." He trails off, waiting for Will to provide a name.

It's not possessiveness. Will tells himself that, but the word rings false. He is...protective, of his time with Hannibal. He is wary of releasing the power of his mate on such gentle folk, though he knows the veneer of Hannibal's person suits ingratiate him with ease to any social setting – certainly with more ease than Will does.

"And please," Malcolm says in the wake of Will's silence; "Feel free to bring him to the Monday socials. I know everyone is eager to meet him."

Will clears his throat, rubbing over his neck again in an anxious gesture. "Right," he murmurs.

Malcolm smiles, having mercy on Will's nerves. "Well, I won't keep you. Have a good day!"

"Thank you," Will says, nodding, and rolls his shoulders as Malcolm gets into his car. He watches him drive away, and Winston and Addy come over, nosing impatiently at his hands, demanding dinner. Will sighs, and smiles down at them, and goes inside, filling their food bowls and shrugging off his jacket as the warmth of his house creeps in under his clothes.

He sighs again, and eyes the clock. Hannibal will arrive soon. Will needs time, needs to figure out why he's feeling the way he is; the strange reluctance, to bring Hannibal into this part of his life. For he knows, once the subject is broached, that Hannibal will effortlessly pierce through his thoughts and drive to the heart of the matter. Will must be prepared.

He sits at his table, where there is a notebook and a pen, as well as his ever-present container of rubber bands. His fingers curl, itching to wrap one around his wrist and snap it there, along the old welts. He hasn't used them for months, but he wants them now. Wants the pain, wants it to focus and ground him and help him think.

He closes his eyes, resting an elbow on the table, and puts his chin in his hand, twisting sharply until his neck cracks. Hannibal will be here soon.

After Will went into rut, Hannibal did not leave his side for a week. He kept Will fed, and hydrated, and satisfied, with his hands and his knot and his mouth. He gave into Will's every need; when Will wanted touch, Hannibal's hands spanned him, mapped him, coaxing tense muscles to weary obedience. When Will needed to bite, Hannibal bared his neck, his chest. Let Will mark his throat and his stomach, his thighs, let Will claw marks to his back and his flanks. Let Will drink his sweet blood and press bruising kisses to his shoulders.

When Will was tired, Hannibal kept watch, purred and pet him through his nightmares that were full of teeth and the sharpest shadows; not friendly shadows, not like Hannibal was. He hummed gentle songs that pierced Will's dreams. He kissed Will awake, centering him, grounding him in the here and now. He called Will 'daydreamer' and 'beloved' and 'mine', and pressed gentle kisses to his sweaty skin until Will's shaking calmed, or grew claws and turned into a different kind of need.

"What does it feel like, Will?" he'd asked.

"Evolution," Will had replied. "Wildness."

"Does it make you feel savage?"

"It makes me want to do savage things."

And Hannibal had smiled, wide and warm, and kissed Will until he forgot what everything tasted like, except Hannibal's mouth. Forgot the smell of anything that wasn't his mate's salted caramel scent. Forgot it all, and lost himself to Hannibal's capable hands.

He lifts his head at the sound of Hannibal's car, opens his eyes and smiles when Hannibal opens the door. He's dressed warmly for the first encroachments of fall, in a thick woolen coat that reaches his knees, his suit pants dark, shoes shining. He smiles at Will as he enters, a bottle of wine in hand and a cooler slung over his shoulder, no-doubt packed full of cuts of meat and organs to prepare for Will during their weekend. Will stands, and helps him shed the cooler and the wine, and places them in the fridge as Hannibal unbuttons his coat and hangs it on the rack by the door.

When he returns, Hannibal meets him, and cups Will's face, pulling him into a deep, long kiss that makes Will shiver, arching close, desperate for the touch of his mate. His cheeks flush, and he's pleased to see a similar heat color Hannibal's cheeks when they pull away. His hand flattens over Will's jaw, tilts his chin up, and Hannibal purrs, leaning in to kiss him again.

Will smiles, and cannot help laughing; "Missed me?"

"Always," Hannibal replies. There seems a certain energy in his touch, something frantic and longing that Will knows is mirrored in his own hands. Hannibal kisses him, again, again, igniting Will at the core. He trembles, and steps back, allowing Hannibal to chase him, to pursue him, until they are in front of the fireplace.

Will pulls back, meets Hannibal's eyes. He measures the prowling gait of the monster there, eyes the shade of tiredness he always looks for, finding none. Hannibal is alert and alive in front of him, smiling faint and soft and so, so full of adoration it makes Will's breath catch.

Hannibal gentles, sensing Will is not quite as responsive as normal, and tilts his head, thumb brushing tenderly along Will's scruffy jaw. "How was your week, darling?" he asks.

Will swallows, tries to shrug off his tempered mood. He doesn't like it when things encroach on his and Hannibal's time together, and yet his emotions, his thoughts, invade like a sickness, turning his lungs sour and his tongue sharp. He licks his lips, tilts his cheek into Hannibal's palm, and sighs.

"The villagers want to meet the monster," he says.

Hannibal blinks at him, and smiles. "And the King finds this disagreeable."

Will huffs. "I'm not the King," he replies, but he's smiling, his dark thoughts coaxed like fine muscle under Hannibal's hand. Hannibal shifts his touch, drags blunt nails down Will's neck and cups him there, pulling him in. Will shivers, and goes, helpless to resist. "And it's not disagreeable. Just..."

Hannibal kisses his temple, hand gentle on Will's nape, noting the tension in his muscles. He doesn't squeeze, doesn't try and coax Will like he would an Omega, doesn't try to placate him. He lets out a soft, considering hum in the wake of Will's silence, and pulls back to meet his eyes.

"Does this conversation require wine?" he asks.

Will swallows, and nods, feeling childish and insecure in the face of Hannibal's calm. But Hannibal does not scold him, nor does it feel like he is judging Will – he never judges Will, accommodates his eccentricities like the most accepting host, even in Will's home. He fills the space, commands it just for being there. Will is not the King, not when Hannibal is here.

Hannibal turns, fetching the wine, and when he returns Will is at his table, his notebook and pen in front of him. He still needs it, sometimes. Speaking the words aloud is so much more difficult than writing them down, even now – Will has had less than a year to learn to communicate this way, but through letters, well, he's been doing that all his life.

He uncaps the pen as Hannibal pours their wine. It's a white, colored faintly orange, though whether that's the liquid's natural state or a simple hue thrown out from the fire, Will cannot say. He takes a drink, tastes cinnamon and crisp apples, and blinks in surprise.

"Cider?" he asks.

"Wine aged in old apple-picking barrels," Hannibal replies, swirling his own glass. "I was inspired by the changing leaves."

Will smiles.

Hannibal eyes him, taking a small sip of his wine as he lets Will settle, and organize his thoughts. Will taps his pen on his notebook, watching little drops of ink spill there from the contact. He sighs, and lifts his gaze.

"Malcolm invited me to help out with the fall festival," he says. "He invited you, too."

Hannibal tilts his head.

"Well, not *you*, specifically. My mate," Will explains, flushing and rubbing the back of his neck. "He also said I should bring you to the Monday social. Get to know the community."

"And this displeases you," Hannibal replies, without inflection. Will presses his lips together, and nods, for he cannot think of a word to more accurately describe what he's feeling. Of all the words in the English language, and for all his mastery of them, he comes up blank. "Do you know why?"

Will sighs. "No," he replies, somewhat sullen. He sets his pen down and sips at the wine again.

Hannibal hums, fingers of his free hand drumming against his thigh. He folds one leg over the other, ankle at the opposite knee, and gives Will a considering look. "Does this encroach on your feelings of shame?" he asks.

Will bites his lower lip, lifts one shoulder in a shrug, and yet shakes his head. "I don't believe so."

Hannibal considers this, his eyes briefly moving away from Will, to the fire, then back again. "So your reluctance doesn't stem from the fact that we are both Alphas, and that you fear the judgement of small-town folk for it."

Will winces. "That might be a part of it," he admits, rubbing over his neck again. Hannibal's eyes drop to the motion, flicker with red, but he schools his expression when Will meets his eyes again. "But it's a fraction of the whole, if so."

Hannibal nods, once. His face still betrays no judgement, and it's too dark for Will to read his eyes properly. It reminds Will of how they had first 'met', as psychiatrist and patient. He gets the impression that Hannibal is trying to press at him, test the boundaries of his thoughts, to find a flaw. It leaves him feeling exposed, frayed, like the edges of an old blanket. Hannibal will rob Will of his defenses, if Will lets him.

"You refer to me as a monster," Hannibal says. Will presses his lips together, ducks his eyes. "Are you worried I might prove threatening to the innocent villagers? Are you compelled to shield them from the likes of me?"

Will winces again, and knows Hannibal sees it. "I think it's the opposite," he replies, jaw clenching, fingers gripping his wine glass tightly. He takes another drink, larger, so that the crisp flavor fills his mouth and stings his tongue. "I am...possessive, of my time with you. The idea of sharing you is something I find...undesirable."

At that, Hannibal smiles, his eyes softening. "Surely your pride can bear an evening of my attention being divided, and placed somewhere else."

There it is. Will's stomach tenses up, tightens, and his upper lip curls back.

Hannibal notices. Of course he does.

His smile widens. "Oh, my sweet Will," he purrs, and Will jerks his head, lifts his chin like a stallion fighting the bit; wants to growl at Hannibal, command his attention and the return of his adoration. His feelings are wild, untethered, and flare angrily at Hannibal's tone. Hannibal stands, and Will does as well, snarling when Hannibal approaches him – but Hannibal is never one to be dissuaded. He delights in the show of Will's fangs, the angry glint of red in his eyes.

He smiles, and cups Will's face, forcing their eyes to meet. "My darling," he murmurs, and his voice is gentler now, sweeter; placating. "You have commanded my attention from the moment I first saw you, from the moment I was given a glimpse to your sharp mind. Every second of my life has your shadow laid upon it."

"Yet you would see me spread thin," Will replies sharply, lifting his chin. "You like how much I need you; don't deny it."

"I don't," Hannibal says with a slow nod. "But..." He sighs, and brushes his fingers gently down Will's jaw, to his shoulders, to his arms. Cradles his wrists and lifts his knuckles to kiss them. "Perhaps I can persuade you to see this in a different light."

Will tilts his head, raises a brow; challenging.

Hannibal smiles, knowing he has Will's attention now. "You are a beautiful young Alpha, Will," he says, and Will flushes, instinctively pulling back, in no mood for flattery. But Hannibal doesn't let him go – holds him fast, draws him in. "Imagine how lucky I will seem, on the arm of one such as you."

Will huffs, and Hannibal nuzzles his cheek, kisses gently at the corner of his mouth. "You brought closure and light to his town," he murmurs. "You wiped away the old pain of my sins, my influence on this place. You are their guardian, and protector, keeping the monster in line."

Will growls, and nips at Hannibal when he tries to kiss. "You're speaking a lot of pretty words without saying anything at all," he mutters.

Hannibal laughs. "Forgive me, darling," he purrs, and kisses Will on the cheek again. "My point is this, and only this: I may see these people as prey animals, but it is you who controls my actions. You, who controls how I am to be received."

And Will thinks he understands, now. He hums, pressing his lips together, and turns his head, and their noses brush. "They love you, Will," Hannibal finishes, cupping Will's face, meeting his eyes. "But you are mine, just as I am yours. And I think it would be very entertaining to see them realize that."

Will huffs a laugh, and finally smiles. Hannibal's eyes brighten with joy upon seeing it. He allows Hannibal to kiss him, this time, and parts his lips for Hannibal's tongue, letting out a soft moan as Hannibal's hands release his, and slide to his flanks, pulling him closer. Hannibal tastes like the wine, sweet and tart and it makes Will feel thirsty.

He shivers, and growls when Hannibal pulls away from him. His head feels hot and he bares his teeth, tugging on Hannibal's shirt. "The wine will keep," he says, low, and shows Hannibal the arch of his throat, smiles when Hannibal growls, pulled in as helpless as leaves on the wind, and kisses his neck.

"Yes," he whispers in reply, and pulls Will towards the stairs. "It will."

Will was Alana's best man for her wedding – though she stubbornly insisted on calling him the 'Maid of Honor', a jab which was then usually followed by a sly wink and a joke about how Hannibal made certain Will was no longer a 'maid' by any means.

Alana wore a black dress for the wedding, and Margot wore white. The image of them, smiling at each other, not a dry eye in sight, was one Will would treasure for eternity. Hannibal had not been part of the wedding party, and sat in the second row with Alana's closest cousin and some of her fellows from her most recent degree.

After, during the wedding reception, Hannibal had cornered Will in a dark hollow of the hotel suites, caught his hand and kissed it, his other subtly rubbing at Will's suit to rid him of the scent of the bridesmaid – Margot's friend, whom he'd walked with down the aisle. He'd kissed Will, then, until Will thought he resembled the blushing bride more than either woman. And Hannibal had smiled at him and kissed him again, drawn him close and whispered;

"One day. One day, I will see you in such ecstasy as that."

Will had never considered that he would marry – Alphas were less concerned with things like that. A mating mark was more permanent than a wedding ring, the blood-bond a result of mutual pleasure and a connection to their mates that spanned time and space. And Will had felt that bond since his childhood, though it only recently gained blood.

He had blushed, and smiled, and replied; "You already do." But he knew, he knew what Hannibal meant. Hannibal is a proud man, who would rob someone of their life for an offense, who would elevate those he loved to the position of God, if they let him.

Will doesn't believe in things like God, in His word. But Hannibal's – oh, he believes Hannibal with all his heart.

Hannibal takes him upstairs, shedding Will's clothes with frantic fervor as Will paws at him, less graciously but just as eager. When they are bare, Hannibal brings him to the bed, laying Will across it, and covers him, hands in Will's hair, pulling him up to another eager kiss.

Hannibal's body falls, crushing, heavy, and Will moans, spreading his legs and digging his nails into Hannibal's back, arching up so that his cock ruts against Hannibal's stomach, already hard, incensed by the scent and taste of his mate. Just as Will learned how to growl to make Hannibal show his red, Hannibal has learned him in return; he knows just how to touch Will, how to purr and snarl just right, to get a reaction out of Will; a tightening in his belly and a thrum to his heart that he's helpless to resist.

Hannibal lifts up, reaches blindly for the bottle of lubricant in Will's bedside table, and wets his fingers. He pushes between Will's legs, panting as Will claws at him, bites his lower lip and drinks down Hannibal's moan as he shoves a finger inside.

Will gasps, groaning softly, weak at the neck and clawing at Hannibal, wanting him deeper, wanting him inside already. They had sex that Monday, before Hannibal left him, and three days suddenly feels like such a long time. Hannibal had been right; every moment of separation stretches for an eternity, and Will hadn't visited him that week.

He *needs*, and it's not as desperate or insane as rut but he needs Hannibal so badly. He tilts his head back, baring his neck for Hannibal's mouth, and clings to him as Hannibal forces another finger in. It seems Hannibal is just as impatient, and Will knows he hates the lack of his own scent covering Will's skin, thick between his legs and staining his mouth, his hair.

"Now," he growls, dragging his nails across Hannibal's flanks, spreading his legs wider. "Fuck me now."

He uses his Voice, knowing Hannibal will not be able to resist it. Hannibal pulls his fingers out immediately, snarling against Will's neck. He pushes his hands behind Will's knees, shoves his shoulders there to force Will to bend in half, and Will moans, eyelids fluttering as Hannibal ruts against him, slicks his hand over his cock to spread the remaining lube there, and then forces his way inside of Will.

Will tenses up, hissing with strain at the sudden stretch. Hannibal's knot will hurt – he wants it to hurt. He claws at Hannibal's neck as Hannibal flattens over him, forces Will into a tight fold, kisses him breathlessly as Will whimpers and makes his body relax, to let Hannibal sink in to the hilt.

"Hannibal," he breathes, begs, between one kiss and the next. Hannibal growls for him, forehead pressing to Will's temple, to his cheek, to his jaw, to coax his head to one side. The bed creaks as Hannibal kneels against him, thighs trembling and hot against Will's ass. He grabs Will's hips, forces him to stay where he is – though with how he's positioned, there is little Will can do aside from lay there and take it – and he fucks in with brutal force, pulls out as reluctantly as he leaves Will on Monday mornings.

"*Will*," he breathes, and he sounds as shaken as Will feels. He kisses, open-mouthed and slack, at Will's sweaty neck, digs in with his nails and thrusts again. "My beautiful, darling Will. I swear, every time I think I could not love you more, it builds in me. Until I feel I might burst with my adoration."

Will sucks in a trembling breath, cradles Hannibal's neck with clawed hands. Lifts him, for a kiss. For a bite, fangs to Hannibal's jaw, and he lifts his head, sucks a mark to Hannibal's neck as Hannibal fucks him, harsh, all his weight behind it. Will's hips ache, his shoulder burns, every part of him feels as though made of glass and ice – cutting, but fragile.

He wishes to shred Hannibal to pieces, to bruise him, and mark him, as Will has been so thoroughly marked from the day of his second conception, when he was eight years old and found that first riddle. There must be a new rebirth for Hannibal too, some poignant stage of evolution where he can say, without doubt, without mercy, that Will has changed him.

He will make it so. One day, the purest ecstasy.

Hannibal growls, lets Will's legs fall from his shoulders and wrap around his waist, so he can pet and kiss Will more thoroughly. Will moans, wrapping himself tight around his mate, forcing Hannibal to fuck him harder, to remain inside him longer before he is compelled to thrust again.

"*Will*," Hannibal breathes, incensed by Will's ardent, shameless desperation for him, for this – Will is not shy, he doesn't know how to be shy when Hannibal is in his bed. "Darling, I – I –."

"Do it," Will demands, for he knows the shudder of Hannibal's inhale. Knows the flex of his tight hands, the dig of his nails, the subtle arching of his hips that means he wants to scratch the itch of his knot, wants to succumb to the urge to pierce Will as fully and deeply as he can and empty himself into Will, a vessel for his love.

Will purrs, encouraging, and licks up Hannibal's sweaty neck, bites at his jaw. Licks, again, at the corner of his mouth, until Hannibal parts his lips with a helpless sound and sags over Will's body. His hands slide up, abruptly gentle, and curl under Will's shoulders, like they are embracing after years apart, and the tenderness makes Will's breath catch.

He rests his forehead to his mate's, opens his eyes and meets Hannibal's, where they are bright with Alpha red and show nothing but stark, desperate need. He smiles, and brushes his knuckles along Hannibal's cheek.

"Knot me," he whispers, and sees his Voice take hold, sink in with teeth. Sees Hannibal's eyes flash and then close, his head bowed to rest against Will's shoulder. Feels him tremble, and spasm, as he presses deep and goes still.

He sighs, petting Hannibal's sweaty hair as his knot swells, locking them tightly together. He clenches his muscles, knowing how good it feels when the pressure around a knot gets tight, and Hannibal, predictably, snarls, parting his teeth and edging them along Will's thrumming pulse. One of his hands takes Will's, from his face, reaches between their bellies to wrap around Will's cock.

Will shivers, whimpering, his hips rolling up just to feel Hannibal's knot tugging at him. Hannibal growls, and his mouth must be so dry, Will knows that feeling. He tilts his head, bares his throat, and Hannibal bites down as Will spills over their hands, shaking and moaning with relief as his orgasm overtakes him in a wave of heat and blood.

Hannibal licks over his neck, licks into Will's mouth to share his taste, and Will sighs, cupping Hannibal's face with his clean hand, wrapping his fingers through Hannibal's hair when he slides it back. Forces Hannibal to kiss him, again, again, until Will's tongue is no longer so parched.

Hannibal is purring when Will allows him air, and gazes down at Will in adoration, touches him with reverence. Will smiles, breathless, eagerly raking in the combined scents of them through the roof of his mouth, and leans up for one more kiss, before he settles with a sigh.

Hannibal tilts his head, absently tucking one sweaty curl behind Will's ear. "These socials are on Monday night?" he asks.

Will nods.

Hannibal lets out a soft, considering hum. "I have appointments in Baltimore, but I should be able to return for the evening," he says. "Should I bring anything?"

Will laughs, and rolls his eyes. "It's a potluck," he replies. "I haven't managed to bring anything I'd feel comfortable with serving to other people, but you're more of a cook than I am, so." He shrugs, and then huffs another laugh. "I don't think you should feed them our usual diet."

"I was thinking something more along the lines of a dessert," Hannibal muses, absently nuzzling Will's cheek, his hips twitching as another wave of arousal overtakes him and he spills again inside of Will. Will shivers, and wishes for a moment he was an Omega, or a woman, or at least able to feel his mate filling him up like they can – wishes he had the nerves and the ability to feel such a sensation.

He hums, closing his eyes, stroking his fingers gently up Hannibal's heaving flanks. "Make something with caramel in it," he says, and Hannibal tilts his head, purring against Will's neck.

"Caramel?" he asks.

Will nods. "That's what you smell like, to me," he replies, and runs his nails lightly up Hannibal's back, sighing as Hannibal's knot deflates and they can separate. Hannibal moves only enough to lay on his side, and pulls Will into his arms. Will shivers, pressing closer, eager for his mate's heat. "Caramel, and salt. And paper."

Hannibal lets out a soft, amused sound, and presses a kiss to Will's hair. "You associate me with things from your youth," he murmurs. "Sweets, and ocean air, and our letters."

Will huffs. "What do I smell like, to you?" he asks.

Hannibal wraps a hand in his hair, stroking it from Will's face, and kisses his forehead. "Mint," he replies. "Lemongrass. Something crisp and citrusy." Will huffs again, wrinkling his nose, for while he understands the allure of scents like that, he imagines them as sharp things, that sting. They are also, he can't help noting, classic flavoring spices for meat. Things that would entice a hunter like Shadow Man.

"When I first smelled you," Hannibal adds, "I remember my reaction. It was strong, and visceral. My mouth flooded with saliva. My heart pounded in my chest." He takes Will's hand, presses it flat over his heart, and Will purrs, feeling its heavy rhythm.

"And when we met?" he asks. "When I sat in your patient's chair, and talked of God?"

Hannibal smiles. "I'll confess something to you, darling," he murmurs, and Will lifts his head and meets his eyes. "When you left my office that day, I swapped the chairs around, so that I could soak in your scent for the rest of the day. I cannot describe how injured I was when I found that, when it was time to go home, there was nothing left of it lingering."

Will's eyes widen, and he sucks in a breath. It is such a simple thing, but Will knows, he *knows*, how much it aches when one's mate's scent fades. Knows it intimately. He cannot help kissing Hannibal, then, and wrapping his fingers in Hannibal's hair as Hannibal slides to him, embraces him tightly, and their skin touches wherever it can, imprinting their scents on each other.

Will pulls back with another weak, eager sound, and touches his own mouth, feels Hannibal's warmth there. He licks his lips, fingers curling, and meets Hannibal's eyes again. He thinks of all the time they spent apart, while Will was growing, maturing, and learning about the world. Now that he knows Hannibal was there for it all, he tries to imagine how it would feel to have his mate's scent in his lungs, to see him and not be able to touch, not be able to approach.

It is like fishing. The fish are there, he can see them bob and weave below the water, but he must wait for them to find his lure interesting enough to die on. Perhaps Hannibal is more of a fisherman than Will gave him credit for.

"I'm here now," he says, for it's all he can say.

Hannibal smiles. "I know, my daydreamer," he purrs in reply, and kisses Will again, pulling him close. "And in your presence, I am content."

When Alana announces that she and Margot will be gone for almost a year, touring the world for their honeymoon, Will cannot help feel sadness. He tells Alana this, in a quiet moment when it's just the two of them, over coffee as he waits for Hannibal to finish with his session and collect Will from the university. He has managed to dodge Jack for the entire day and it's a minor victory, but one he treasures.

"You have been the best friend I could ask for," he tells her, sipping at his overly-bitter coffee while she drinks her chai tea latte, and the sugary sweetness of it stings his nose and reminds him of how she was in college. Where Will relied on caffeine and sheer stubbornness, she relied on sugar. He envies her metabolism.

She smiles at him, glowing with happiness. Like Margot has lit a fire in her, and it makes him think of Hannibal – was Alana another dimmed ember, and Will too caught up in his own drama and his own self-obsession to recognize it? Could they have found their flames together?

Of course, it doesn't matter now. Will has his mate, Alana has hers, and they are both much better for it, he's sure of that.

"I'm not *dying*, Will," she replies, rolling her eyes. "I'm just going on a trip. People go on trips all the time."

"I know," he replies, nodding. "Forgive my sentimentality." He pauses, and sighs down at his drink. "I'm going to miss you."

Her eyes glitter with mirth, though it is subdued, for she knows he's being serious. "I'll call and send letters whenever I can," she tells him. "And I'll pick my favorite places and maybe we can all go back sometime – you, me, Hannibal, and Margot."

He smiles. "That would be nice," he says. He has never been outside of the United States, but he knows Hannibal is well-traveled, or at least cultured enough to know about the world. He wants to visit Hannibal's homeland, and Paris, where he studied. Italy, where he honed his artistry, both with pencil and knife. His smile widens, more genuine; "I'd like that."

"Good," she chirps, and reaches out to touch his hand. "Look at us," she says, grinning. "Who'd have thought? You, with a super charming, handsome, *wealthy* Alpha *psychiatrist*, of all things, and me, a beautiful socialite who isn't a vapid bitch."

Will laughs, covering his mouth.

"Margot's words," Alana says, winking. "Not mine. She talks a lot of shit about pretty much everyone we meet at her parties."

"And you call *me* terrible," Will replies, and sips at his coffee. "Though I'm pretty sure if I ever joined Hannibal at one of his dinners, or the Opera, or whatever else, I'd probably be much the same."

Alana tilts her head, a crease forming between her brows. "What do you guys...*do*, if you don't go out?" she asks.

Will tilts his head at her, one eyebrow raised.

She blinks, and blushes. "*Seriously?*" she demands, and Will shrugs, his cheeks coloring as well, and takes another drink of his coffee. "Goddamn, Graham, are you guys just animals or something?"

"We talk a lot," Will says with another shrug. "I just...enjoy being in his company. And *only* in his company. He makes me feel..." He stops, trying to find the right word, the perfect word, that can thoroughly encompass the joy, the exhilaration, the sheer *rightness* of being with Hannibal. "Whole."

Her expression softens, and she smiles. "I'm glad to hear that," she says, and pets his hand before withdrawing and wrapping her pale fingers around her coffee cup. The day is cold, though sunny, and for some Godforsaken reason the air conditioning is still on full-blast. "I don't know, I think I would get restless after a while. And taking Margot out, watching her dress up all pretty and seeing her interacting with other people, it's..."

Will's eyebrows rise again, and he grins at her, lopsided and teasing; "That sounds awfully Alpha of you."

She rolls her eyes and kicks his shin under the table. "Come on, you don't get off on the idea of seeing Hannibal, all those people fawning over him – and they *do* fawn, Will, I won't lie – and knowing that he's going home with you at the end of the night?"

Will tilts his head, considering. In all honesty the thought had never occurred to him. But he bristles, internally, at her words. Perhaps he should go to one of Hannibal's parties, if only to mark Hannibal up first, dirty him with his scent and sweat, and see the Alphas and Omegas he entertains take in the scent of him. He imagines them looking between Hannibal and Will,

understanding dawning. Imagines it quickly followed by jealousy, by outrage, that Hannibal would deign to mate with someone like *Will*. Imagines the women cooing at Hannibal, only for their eyes to widen when they see the marks Will leaves with his teeth on Hannibal's neck. He'd make Hannibal wear something that exposed his throat, to make sure they were on display – or simply bite higher, where neither clothing nor Hannibal's hair could hide it.

He clears his throat, and shifts his weight, but her eyes are sharp and knowing when he meets them. He flushes, and she grins.

"I guess I can see the allure," he concedes. She laughs, and winks at him again.

Hannibal returns to him on Monday night, twenty minutes before they're due to leave for the social at the church. Will eyes his choice of clothing, notes the high collar, the tightly-knotted tie, the layer of shirt, vest, and suit jacket.

He hums, and tilts his head, and approaches his mate. Hannibal is eager to kiss him, and Will lets him, lures him into a dull-edged complacency as he brushes his fingers over Hannibal's fine clothes, up his chest. Lets his lips part as Hannibal, sensing his eagerness, leans into him, eager to touch and taste.

He tugs at the knot of Hannibal's tie, pulling it loose, and then unwinding it, and tugs it free. Hannibal huffs, pulling back with a look of amusement and surprise combined, and Will simply grins at him, and unbuttons the top three buttons of his shirt, pulling the halves of the collar apart so that Hannibal's bitten neck is exposed.

He pats Hannibal's chest, and throws the tie onto one of the chairs around his table. "Better," he murmurs.

Hannibal raises a brow, and tilts his head. "You're in an incendiary mood, my love."

Will smiles, though he thinks it more of a grimace, and he brushes his hands down his sweater, tugging on the sleeves so they cover his wrists. "I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm not looking forward to tonight."

"Then why are we going?" Hannibal asks, and Will fixes him a look.

"We're going because you convinced me to," he says curtly, and growls when Hannibal merely laughs.

"I merely offered an alternative point of view," he says mildly. Even as Will watches, he sheds his suit jacket, undoes his cufflinks and rolls his sleeves to his elbows, dressing down further. Will's mouth waters at the side of him, and he wonders if Hannibal would let him bite and mark his wrists, since the skin is exposed there, too.

"Well, if Malcolm and Deborah asked about you one more time, I'd have wrung their necks myself." At that, Hannibal huffs a laugh, and it eases the tension in Will's shoulders, makes

them sag, and roll. "I suppose I just.... They feel like conservative people. People who, despite their good hearts and best intentions, will judge us."

"Judge *us*," Hannibal repeats. "Not just you, or me."

Will frowns at him. "We are one unit, Hannibal. A slight against you is an offense against me. I would hope that is true in reverse."

"Of course it is, darling. I suppose I simply find it funny you think yourself worthy of judgement."

"I never said that." Then, "So you believe they will look negatively on you, not me."

"You have already settled yourself here. Despite your otherness, you have made friends. You have a history with these people."

Will frowns, and says, "Otherness?"

"Your solitude. Your nighttime walks. Your choice of home."

Will huffs, and grabs his coat, leading the way to Hannibal's car. In the backseat, he can see a covered tray, and when he opens the door, the smell of chocolate and caramel wafts to him and he gives an appreciative hum, sliding into place in the passenger seat as Hannibal takes the driver's side.

"One might say these habits of yours made you a perfect target for a man like me," Hannibal continues. Will's brow creases and when he looks to Hannibal, he sees him smiling – playful, but there is an edge of something there, something genuine and concerned. "I am older, arguably in a position of greater power. People may think I'm taking advantage of you."

"You do take advantage of me," Will replies, and Hannibal looks at him, brows raised. "Because I give that advantage. Perception is relative. Ask a painter what color forms when all the others are mixed together, and they will say black. Ask a physicist, and they will say white."

Hannibal smiles, and starts the car. The heating blasts at Will's face and he shivers, settling into place, as Hannibal turns the car and drives to the main road. He seems to know where he's going, so Will is content to sit and let him navigate until he asks for direction.

"The world in which we navigate is hardly a question of black or white," Hannibal says mildly.

Will nods, huffing a breath. He looks to his mate again, rakes his eyes down Hannibal's strong arms, his thighs, the exposed bruising and raw bite marks on his neck. Will gave him new ones over the weekend, the freshest standing out and barely-scabbed.

He doesn't say anything, and neither does Hannibal. They find the church, and the parking lot is almost full to bursting. Will shifts his weight, anxiety clenching in his stomach, and kneads restlessly at his thighs. He can see Malcolm and Deborah's car, Elijah's truck, and Harrison's van here already.

His breath catches. *Elijah*.

"Did you ever meet John's mate?" he asks.

Hannibal looks at him, and then nods. "He and his parents came with John's to officially identify the body, at the morgue," he replies.

Will looks at him, eyes wide. "He might recognize you."

Hannibal shakes his head, smiling. "He barely looked at me," he replies. Then, his head tilts, considering. "He was a sweet boy. I felt genuine sorrow for his loss."

Will snaps his jaws together, thinking of how Hannibal might have looked at a boy like Elijah. He has tried to keep a lid on his jealousy, on his possessiveness, but a flicker of it escapes, a tendril of smoke from a fire dampened by sand.

It might spark, and rage.

"Will." Hannibal's hand covers one of his own, gently easing his fingers from the tight curl of a fist, and Will's eyes snap to him, bright and harsh. His head feels warm and he thinks, he thinks, if Elijah touches Hannibal, he doesn't know what he might do. He thinks of how Elijah reacted to him, instinctively – thinks of how attractive Hannibal is, how good he smells, thinks what any unmated Omega might do in his presence.

"Will," Hannibal says again, and Will growls. "Darling, please. While I find your possessiveness delightful, it is unwarranted."

"Unwarranted," Will repeats, snapping the word. He swallows at the look on Hannibal's face, takes a deep breath of the air that smells warm, and of Hannibal, and of him. He wishes Hannibal had arrived earlier, so Will could thoroughly scent-mark him, and claim him in a way undeniable to those with the instincts to smell it.

"Yes," Hannibal says, and lifts Will's hand, which has reformed into a fist. He kisses Will's knuckles, and holds his gaze, and Will hates how this makes him feel, hates the petulance, the venom, bubbling up in his throat. He's sure if he were to say anything right now, he would instantly regret it.

It's childish. It's terrible. And yet;

"Kiss me," he demands, voice making his words rough. Hannibal's eyes flash, and he drops Will's hand, and lunges across the console, fingers wrapped in Will's hair. He kisses deeply, needy, and Will answers him in kind; bites his anger into Hannibal's lip, rakes his nails over his mate's exposed neck. He growls when Hannibal shivers, and wants to shed blood. Wants to wound him.

He pulls back before he can, notes the flush on Hannibal's face with pleasure, smiles at the sight of his spit-slick lips. "Better," he murmurs, thumbing over Hannibal's cheek, and then he turns, and exits the car. He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him, shocked and wide, and he takes the covered dish from the backseat.

Hannibal recovers, and joins him, and they enter the church.

The church is not like the ones Will remembers in Baltimore. Further still, from the Baptist halls and Lutheran churches in Louisiana that his uncle dragged him to on occasion. It doubles as the town hall, and the innards of it are intimate and welcoming, brightly lit with soft, warm lights in the ceiling, and candles at the entryway. The walls are white, the roof a sandy wood, the carpet a deep ocean-blue.

There is a veritable hoard of people inside already, and one wall entirely dedicated to food. The scents of every dish combines into something overwhelming, and Will's stomach turns. He cannot imagine how Hannibal, with his keen sense of smell, is handling it.

He leads Hannibal to the dessert table and Hannibal sets the dish down, uncovering it to reveal a tray of millionaire shortbread – no doubt made from scratch. There is a thick line of caramel and a crust of chocolate, and Will cannot help smile, seeing it.

He looks up, and Hannibal's expression is one of hopeful joy, that brightens at seeing Will's pleasure.

"Will!"

Will turns, catching Deborah's eyes as she approaches him. She's dressed in a floral affair, a skirt that does to her ankles, white, with blue flowers on it, and a curtain of fake flowers hanging from her neck over her white shirt. She greets him with a wide smile and pets his arm in greeting. "So nice of you to make it."

Her eyes go to Hannibal immediately, flashing in equal parts lack of recognition and immediate understanding. Will sees her look at Hannibal's neck, take in his attire, and her lips purse.

"Deborah," Will says gently, covering her hand with his own. "I'd like to introduce my mate, Doctor Hannibal Lecter."

Deborah nods, and recovers quickly, but there is a tightness around her eyes, the same Will saw when she spoke of Elijah and his lack of a proper mate when Molly was conceived. "Hannibal," she greets, and holds out her hand. Hannibal takes it with a smile. "What an interesting name."

"A family one," Hannibal replies cordially, and lets her hand go. Will is almost surprised he didn't kiss it – he seems like the kind of man to do that, but won't deny he's pleased by Hannibal's aloof, unfamiliar approach. "It's nice to meet you, Deborah. Will has told me many wonderful things about you. I believe it is you I owe thanks for making Will feel so welcome here."

"Oh, well." She tosses her hair and her cheeks color with pleasure, and she smiles, apparently warming up to him quickly. Most people do. "It's the neighborly thing to do."

"Of course," Hannibal replies, still smiling.

"So, how did you two meet?" she asks, curiosity apparently overwhelming her thinly-veiled judgement, though Will suspects there is no real malice to it. She's one of those people who says things like 'I don't understand it, personally, but as long as they're happy, they're not hurting anyone, who am I to judge?' followed immediately by 'You must start attending service, to find the right path to God'.

Will steps close to Hannibal's side, pleased when he hears Hannibal give a soft purr of approval, though he doesn't move to touch Will. "I've known Hannibal for a long time," he replies, so that Hannibal can hear the story he wove and will be able to repeat it, should he be asked without Will's supervision. "Since I was a kid."

"Is that so?" Deborah asks, one eyebrow arching. Undoubtedly measuring the difference in years between them.

"Yes," Will replies, nodding. "He was a dear friend to me, and comforted me when my father died."

"But you only mated recently," she says, and nods to Hannibal's bitten neck.

Will winces, biting his lower lip.

"Yes," Hannibal says, speaking up, and he places a hand on the small of Will's back in a gentle, reassuring touch. Will breathes in deeply, letting himself relax, letting the presence and scent of his mate calm him. He feels jittery, on edge, and wants Hannibal's influence to affect him, so he lets it. He turns his head to see Hannibal smiling at him, faint and fond. "It was a long courtship, and the happiest day of my life, when Will finally agreed to be mine."

Will huffs, and wants to argue, wants to say he would have been Hannibal's from the beginning, but for the sake of their story, he resists. It wouldn't do good to sour people's perception of Hannibal by revealing the true origin of their relationship. At best, it would appear as grooming – at worst, like Hannibal was some kind of predator, preying on Will's youth and innocence when he was young.

It wasn't like that. Will knows that, and Hannibal knows that. But the outside world, well...

Deborah sighs, and Will turns to see her smiling. "Well, I must say you two look very much in love," she says kindly. "Reminds me of the day Malcolm proposed. Oh! Hannibal, you must meet my husband, he's around here somewhere."

"I'd be delighted," Hannibal purrs, rubbing his hand up Will's back, then down.

Will nods when Hannibal looks at him, stepping away, giving Hannibal permission to leave him. Deborah is the social queen of this particular gathering, and to deny her would be rude, but to accept her and allow her to make the first graces of introduction will soften Hannibal

to the others. And it will allow Will a moment to himself, to center and ground his thoughts and soften the edges of his teeth.

Hannibal goes with Deborah, and Will takes a square of the dessert Hannibal made, eager to taste. He takes a bite, cupping his hand under the crumbling shortbread, and sighs in pleasure – it's sweet, delicious, of course. Exactly what he needs.

"Hey, Will."

Will turns, and smiles at Elijah as the Omega appears at his side. "Hey," he murmurs, covering his mouth with an apologetic smile. Elijah grins, waits for Will to swallow, before he speaks again;

"Who's your friend?"

Will swallows, his mouth suddenly dry from the sweetness of the dessert, and he looks over his shoulder to see Hannibal with Malcolm, now. He can't tell what they're talking about, but Malcolm is laughing and has a familiar hand on Hannibal's shoulder, so he assumes it's going well.

"My mate," he replies.

Elijah blinks, and tilts his head. Lifts his chin to scent the air, and frowns. "He's...an Alpha, right?"

Will nods. "That's right."

"Oh."

Will takes the second bite of shortbread, swallowing it harshly.

"Is that gonna be a problem?" he asks. He doesn't want to fight about it, but he wants to fight – ideally, with Hannibal, who he knows can overpower and work him through it like a show horse with too much energy. He can run Will into the ground, control his teeth and his hands, make him *take* until Will is too exhausted to resist him.

Elijah's eyes widen, like he can smell Will's anger. He probably can. He holds up his hands and lets out a soft, placating whine and Will stiffens, turning his gaze away.

"No! No, of course not," Elijah says, voice high and sweet and Will's stomach turns. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound judgmental or anything like that. I swear."

Will wipes a hand over his mouth, forces himself to calm, forces himself to breathe. He rolls his shoulders, wincing at the pull in them, and straightens, and sighs. He runs a hand through his hair and his other hand goes to Elijah's, gently touching.

"I'm sorry," he murmurs. "I'm just...a little on edge."

Elijah's bright eyes are soft, his smile wary, and his fingers curl against Will's palm. "It's okay," he says, all the passive gentleness of his breed in his voice. Will nods, swallowing

again. It's not okay, but he will accept Elijah's forgiveness for the sake of his nerves. "I just... didn't know you were..."

"Right."

"Have you known him long?"

Will smiles, and nods. "Yes," he replies. Elijah nods, and looks over his shoulder in the direction Hannibal is. His brow creases, and his head tilts. Will joins him in looking, sees Hannibal leaned in close as Deborah whispers something in his ear. No doubt spreading gossip, sensing Hannibal's penchant for it, his eagerness to learn everyone's deep, dark secrets.

"He seems familiar," Elijah murmurs.

Will swallows, his fingers curling. This is what he had been afraid of.

"I can't possibly know him," Elijah adds.

Will sighs, and straightens. "He was the visiting M.E. for John's autopsy," he says lowly.

Elijah's eyes snap to him, wide, and then something shifts, there, a recognition burning and darkening his irises. "*Oh*," he murmurs, and Will cannot quite place the expression on his face. "Oh...of course. That's where I recognize him from." He clears his throat, shifting his weight. There's no suspicion, there – why would there be? "Did you meet him when you were investigating John's case?"

Will blinks. What a neat concept. "Yes," he replies, smiling. "He was a consultant for many of my cases with the FBI. That's how we met." He will have to tell Hannibal the story, to make sure he plays along when and if Elijah approaches him.

His fingers curl, and his chest tightens painfully, thinking of that. No, it would be best to keep them separate, if only for Will's peace of mind.

Elijah smiles at him, faint and meek. "Well, it's good to see you," he says, brushing his hand down Will's arm. "Please don't be a stranger."

"I won't," Will replies, nodding. "Are Molly and Wally here?"

Elijah shakes his head. "She took him out of town for a camping trip," he tells Will, and Will accepts that with a hum. Elijah huffs a strange, sheepish laugh. "I'll admit, I'd forgotten what it was like to be in an empty house. All alone."

Will blinks, and wants to take a step back. Elijah is just being friendly – he considers Will a friend, after all. Nothing more. But Elijah's touch on his arm still lingers, and Will thinks of other Alphas he's heard about, ones that have wives and Omegas on the side. Ones that keep harems. Ones that are mated and yet...

He does move, then, enough that Elijah's hand naturally slides from him, and the Omega shifts his weight, clearly sensing Will's discomfort.

"I get it," Will offers, trying to placate, but he's never been good at placating, never had an Omega to practice on. "But I imagine it's nice, to have some peace and quiet."

Elijah shrugs. "I suppose," he replies, and then looks up as another group of people Will only recognizes vaguely enter the church. But Elijah's eyes brighten in recognition, and he smiles at Will. "I'll see you around, Will."

"See you," Will says, nodding once, and then Elijah leaves, melting into the crowd.

Hannibal appears in his absence, watching the Omega go, before he approaches Will. Will gravitates to him, sucking in a shaking breath when Hannibal immediately wraps a hand around his shoulder and meets his eyes.

"Are you alright?" he murmurs.

Will shakes his head, swallowing harshly. "He recognized you," he murmurs.

Hannibal blinks, eyes darkening.

"He assumed we met while I worked for the FBI," Will adds, quick to explain; "I told him that. He's not -. He doesn't suspect."

Hannibal nods, softening somewhat, though Will senses he's still attentive, watching the crowd from the corner of his eye. He lifts his head and places a hand on Hannibal's chest, lets the beat of his heart soothe, lets his scent gentle Will's distress.

He forces himself to smile. "Have you made them all fall in love with you?" he asks.

Hannibal huffs a laugh. "They are very friendly," he concedes. He has a cup of punch in his hand and Will takes it from him, tipping it back in a desperate need to wet his dry mouth. Hannibal head tilts, watching him do it. "Would you like to leave?"

"Desperately," Will replies. "But I don't want to be rude."

Hannibal smiles, and cups his cheek. "Darling, I place your happiness and comfort above all else. In that vein, I can accommodate a little rudeness."

Will winces, feeling that childish acid bubble up in his throat again. *Accommodate*. He suddenly hates that word. He turns away, pulls from Hannibal's touch, and growls when he realizes he's cornered, and there is no way, realistically, he can remove himself from the situation.

Hannibal notices. He always does.

He takes Will's hand and Will wants to growl, but he also doesn't want to make a scene. He allows Hannibal to guide him outside, where there is a statue of the Virgin Mary painted in blue light, surrounded by fresh flowers despite the seasons encouraging flowers to die.

Hannibal turns him, and puts his hands on Will's shoulders. Will growls, wants to shrug him off, and snaps his teeth together until they grind.

"Will," he says, and Will turns his face away, fixes his eyes at Mary's feet. They're white, the stone carved to show a line of toes, though it's weathered and worn so it appears like the faint imprint of feet buried under sand. "Will, please, look at me."

Will does, because he can't refuse his mate anything.

Hannibal straightens, like he didn't actually expect Will to obey, and his hands slide up Will's shoulders, to his neck, cupping gently. "Talk to me," he murmurs.

Will swallows, his chest too warm, his throat too tight to speak. He touches Hannibal's chest and shivers in the cold, shivers under Hannibal's heat. Wants to press closer. Wants to pull away. If he could just fucking *articulate* what he's feeling, he knows Hannibal would be able to reassure him, to comfort him, to pull Will away from these dark thoughts and make him see the light.

He wishes he had a rubber band around his wrist.

He pulls back, because it's easier to think when Hannibal isn't touching him, and rubs both hands down either side of his neck, wincing when the action causes Hannibal's bites to flare in aching pain – they never hurt when Hannibal touches him, but Will is apparently more than capable of hurting himself.

He sighs, and drops his eyes to their shoes. "I think we made a mistake, Shadow Man," he says.

Hannibal is silent. Then, so achingly soft Will barely hears it; "A mistake?"

Will nods.

He lifts his eyes.

Hannibal is clearly trying to school his expression, to keep his face neutral, but Will sees the tremble in his hands, the soft, deep hurt in his eyes, the downward turn of his mouth. Will has wounded him, deeply, and he didn't mean to, he didn't *mean* to -.

"I don't know how to talk to you," Will murmurs. Hannibal's head tilts, and the hurt deepens; Will sees it like a physical thing, like he might have gutted Hannibal where he stood and now he's watching him bleed out. "I don't understand how to communicate with you like I feel I should."

"Will." Hannibal's voice is soft, so quiet. "Please."

Will shakes his head, digs his nails into his nape and closes his eyes.

"I don't want to disappoint you," he breathes. "I don't want you to have to...*accommodate* me." He hisses the word.

"Oh, God, Will, no, that's not -."

"Hannibal, *please*," Will growls, and his head is hot, it's hot and it's burning and he wants to claw his skin away, melt his flesh to the bone, dig himself a hole in Hannibal's chest, into the one he's so ruthlessly carving, and never come out. His fingers shake, and he clenches his eyes tightly shut, like a child hoping that if he doesn't see the monsters, they can't get him.

Childish, you're being childish.

"Please, just let me talk."

He opens his eyes, sees Hannibal, sees him shake, he must be cold, but he stands as a monument, something ancient and powerful that is undeniably cracking at the foundations and Will can't stop *carving*.

He takes a breath in, holds it. Tries to ignore the way Hannibal's eyes are shining.

"I thought I was ready," he murmurs, and finally makes his hands drop. He will not be defensive; he owes Hannibal openness. Owes him eye contact, and it hurts, it fucking *hurts*. "But I don't -. I can't -." He swallows, lifts his eyes to the sky, his nails scratching at the old scars on his left wrist until they sting.

"You came to me as a child and now my attachment to you, my need for you, is *childish*," Will says. "My love for you is unevolved, and it is base, and that's not fair, to either of us. My insecurities aren't fair to either of us. And I don't know how to...fix that."

Will has seen men tortured. He has seen men dying. He doesn't think any of them came close to the look on Hannibal's face.

Hannibal presses his lips together, sucks in a breath but it stutters, like his lungs refuse to obey. He is the one who drops his gaze, this time, to the span of concrete between their shoes.

"It seems that you are my equal, in regard to cruelty," he murmurs. Will swallows, folding his arms across his chest, defensive. He ducks his head to Mary's feet again. "Are you going to send me away?"

Will closes his eyes, and shakes his head. "I couldn't survive that," he whispers. "Could you?"

"No, Will. I don't think I could."

At that, Will manages a weak smile, and opens his eyes. Meets Hannibal's, and finds them shadowed with the purest, harshest sorrow he's ever seen. And Will put that look on his face, that darkness in his eyes, and he hates it. Hates himself for placing it there.

He takes a single step forward, tentative, and Hannibal is frozen in place, unmoving as stone. Will lifts his chin, lifts his eyes, and uncrosses his arms.

"Shadow Man," he whispers, and Hannibal's eyes flash, his chest heaves, his fingers curl like they want to reach. "I love you." And Hannibal appears caved in, cracked to the foundations, crumbling to dust and Will thinks he must be cruel, he must be so cruel, and savage – and is that what Hannibal has made him? This monster?

"I love you," he says again, and touches Hannibal's face. Cups his cheek, feels his jaw clench. "And I want to be with you. It's not...this isn't throwing out the project. The premise is good, and the science is sound, but we didn't get the right results, this time."

"Will, please," Hannibal whispers. He still hasn't moved. "End my suffering."

Will swallows, and steps closer still, tilts Hannibal's head down so their noses brush. Hannibal's exhale tastes like pain, his scent is saccharine with that ache, that dreadful feeling Will knows well.

He breathes in, forces himself to soak in his mate's pained scent, for it's what he deserves. "I will not send you away," he whispers, and Hannibal sags, and finally breaks, cupping Will's flanks. Will brushes his thumb along Hannibal's cheek, and hopes Hannibal can see how much this hurts him, too. "But we.... My whole life, we played games. You gave me riddles, and puzzles, and this one is too hard for me to solve on my own. I need your help."

"Anything," Hannibal breathes. He pulls Will closer, rests their foreheads together. "You are the most precious thing in the world to me." His voice is thick, and weak, and Will wonders how he can even speak at all, his throat sounds so tight. "To know that you are hurting spears me to the heart. Just..." He stops, and swallows, and wraps one hand in Will's hair. "Tell me what you need."

Will doesn't know what he needs. But he knows what he wants. "Take me home," he whispers, pulling back, but he keeps Hannibal's hand in his, their fingers entwined. Hannibal nods, swallowing again, and though he tries to bring his armor back, Will can see he is wounded, and fortifications mean nothing when the hearth is already destroyed.

Will takes Hannibal's hand when Hannibal parks the car and they get out, and he pulls Hannibal inside. There is no fire, and the dogs are locked in the kitchen, and Will brings Hannibal to the living room. He pulls Hannibal into a kiss and it's so soft, so gentle, like Hannibal is afraid of overstepping his boundaries. His hands shake on Will's hips, and Will hates the hesitance. Hannibal is unshakeable, unbreakable, and yet Will feels he has broken him.

He kneels, and has Hannibal join him on his knees. The air is dark, he cannot even see Hannibal's red, but he feels his exhale, feels the tremble of his fluttering heart beneath his hands. He presses close, presses in, until Hannibal settles on his haunches and Will pulls him closer, turns them, so Hannibal is sitting, with Will straddling his lap.

He tugs at Hannibal's vest, buttons giving meagre protest before parting. Then, Hannibal's shirt, and Will's hands are greedy, pressing flat to his chest. He wants to cradle Hannibal's heart, to bite it, to consume it and maybe then, maybe then, he will feel like he owns Hannibal completely.

Perhaps that is the issue, he thinks, as he kisses down Hannibal's neck, over his shoulder as he pulls the clothing free and pushes it down Hannibal's arms. Hannibal is still, beneath him, his scent warm and his breaths weak.

He grabs for Will, tries to unclothe him, tries to move him, and Will shushes him gently, nuzzling his mate's pulse. "Be still," he whispers, feeling Hannibal shiver. "You're right; I have been remarkably, savagely cruel to you, and you have done nothing to deserve it." Nothing, except everything. Deserved it just by existing.

"Will." Hannibal's voice is little more than a whisper.

Will swallows, and lets himself purr. It's a loud sound, filling the dark, quiet air, and Hannibal trembles under him, clutches at his thighs as Will runs his hands along Hannibal's shoulders, up into his hair, and kisses him.

Shadow Man had consumed Will's thoughts, his dreams, his conscience in its entirety, before Will knew enough about the ways of men to fight back. The walls and fortifications mean nothing when the hearth is already destroyed, and Will's had never been built to begin with. And yet he comes, half-formed and knowing only what he was taught, to a man who has always been himself, always known himself.

What Will needs, he thinks, as he pushes Hannibal to his back and runs gentle hands down his chest, to his suit pants, is to destroy Hannibal in turn. To claim his heart, his homestead. To make it so that any would-be conqueror of him might climb atop the walls and peek over, only to see Will's influence thriving.

He growls to himself, and parts his jaws on Hannibal's flank, biting down gently. Hannibal's breath catches, and his hand threads through Will's hair.

No, he tells himself. That is petulant. That is childish.

What, then?

He undoes Hannibal's suit pants, pulls the halves apart, and tugs them down with his underwear, just to his thighs. Hannibal isn't hard, his scent too sharp with pain to react to Will as he normally does. Will hums, nuzzling his mate's chest, and kisses above his heart.

"I love you," he says, and Hannibal whines, and tugs on his hair. Will closes his eyes, though it does nothing except add another layer to the darkness, and his hand wraps, gentle and warm, around Hannibal's cock. Hannibal shivers, stomach sinking in, and Will smiles when he feels Hannibal's cock twitch, undeniably reactive, and starts to fill in his hand.

He leans up, bows down, reverent as he touches Hannibal, and nudges his thighs between Hannibal's knees, makes him spread and arch, and kisses his open mouth. Hannibal growls against him, hand tightening in Will's hair, and kisses back. Will knows he wants to bite, wants to be savage and cruel to Will in turn.

Will would let him.

"You made me into this," he says, kissing the words to Hannibal's tense jaw. Hannibal growls, his other hand finally reacting, digging into Will's clothed shoulder. "Not by design, I know that. I know you would have never wanted me to doubt how much you love me. But you must understand; you left me with no other choice."

He tightens his hand on Hannibal's cock, feels him shiver, hears him let out a weak, low sound. Will purrs, still, wanting to soothe his mate, to comfort him in the darkness as Hannibal has so often comforted him. This is a waking nightmare, and Will knows how to deal with nightmares.

"There was always only you," Will says, sighing, nuzzling the latest bite mark on Hannibal's neck. He rubs his thumb along the head of Hannibal's cock, smearing the wetness there, lets the slight damp of Hannibal's sweat ease the glide of his fingers as he works them back down. "And you were free, to discard me at any time."

"I would never -."

Will kisses him. "Hush," he breathes. He rears up, tugs at the button and zip of his jeans, pulls his cock free and then flattens himself between Hannibal's legs, growling as they rut together, a slick, smooth glide. His hands grip Hannibal's flanks, his hips roll, and he bows his head as Hannibal touches him, presses his hands under Will's sweater and shirt to touch smooth flesh.

He rolls his hips again, fucks forward and collapses, his nose to Hannibal's neck, since like this he's not tall enough to reach his mouth.

"You've called me perfect," he whispers. "You've called me yours. Even called me your equal, but sometimes -." He stops, hissing, growling as he ruts again, feels Hannibal slick and hard for him. "Sometimes it doesn't feel like that. I am a mistress in your world."

Which isn't fair, and Will knows it's not fair. He knows Hannibal would eagerly bring him to his table, to his parties, to his friends. He would watch Will flirt and show his neck and just like Alana said, know Will was going to warm *his* bed that night, and be satisfied with that. So why can't Will? Why is Will's need for him so savage, so singular in his jealousy?

Hannibal leans up, unable to help it, and wraps his hands around Will's shoulders, bringing him in for a kiss. The angle is new, makes their cocks smear between their stomachs – Hannibal's, bare and warm, Will's, covered in soft cotton and wool. Will trembles at the change, kisses back, lets go with one hand to cup Hannibal's face in return.

Then, he pulls back, and nudges his forehead to Hannibal's shoulder. He trembles, and whines. "Touch me," he begs. "Please."

Hannibal growls in answer, one hand still tight on Will's neck, the other wrapping around both of their cocks in his strong fingers, stroking them together in a tight fist. Will breathes out, trembling, and rests his forehead against Hannibal's shoulder, shifts and climbs into his lap so that the angle is better.

He touches Hannibal's cheek, feels it wet, and his own eyes burn. "Tell me you love me," he says.

"I do," Hannibal replies, breathless, achingly soft. "I love you, Will."

Will winces, and clenches his jaw. "Even now?"

"Now and forever," Hannibal says, and Will sags against him, clinging to him. He ruts forward, desperate for Hannibal's touch, desperate for his kiss – both demands Hannibal eagerly grants, and he kisses Will and trembles for him as Will's stomach clenches, bears down, and he sobs as he spills over Hannibal's hand.

"I'm sorry," he says, still clinging. He bites Hannibal's shoulder but it is gentle, he owes Hannibal gentleness. "I'm so sorry."

Hannibal sighs, and lets go of Will, using Will's seed as wetness as he touches himself and Will drops a hand, helps him, cradles his cock and strokes the swell of his knot as Hannibal grunts, his orgasm sharpening his scent, just briefly. He's not sad anymore, or if he is, Will can't smell it; it smells too much like both of them, and he's drowning.

"Don't leave me," Will says.

"I won't, my daydreamer," Hannibal replies, and Will sags again, not realizing how much he needed to hear Hannibal call him that until he did. In the darkness, they feel new, and Will doesn't know where to put his hands but he knows he wants to touch Hannibal, feel his racing heart, his heaving, fractured lungs. Wants to kiss him, so he does, and tastes salt on Hannibal's tongue. "Don't send me away."

"I won't," Will vows. "I won't. I won't."

They fall asleep on the floor, in a pile of sweat and dirty clothes. Will couldn't bear to part with Hannibal long enough to redress, or to move, and in the morning his shoulder aches and Hannibal's eyes are red, but he holds Will tightly, clinging to him, and kisses him uncaring for morning breath.

Will swallows, and closes his eyes, burying his face in Hannibal's neck. "Do you have to go to Baltimore?" he asks.

Hannibal sighs, and the sound aches. "Yes," he replies. "Come with me."

Will shakes his head. "I can't." He doesn't give an excuse. Hannibal doesn't ask for one. Baltimore is still too strange, too cold to him, despite the blaze of welcoming fire that is Hannibal's home. Will wonders if he could ever go back, for real. If that would calm the raging, roiling oceans of doubt and fear in his chest.

No, he thinks it would only make it worse.

They part, long enough to rise, and shower, plastered together under the warm water. Whenever Hannibal isn't touching him, he aches, *God*, it hurts. It hurts and it's Will's own Goddamn fault and he doesn't know how to fix it.

Hannibal kisses him once they're dressed. Once his coat is on. Once he's ready to leave. Will would kill him to make him stay – would kill every single of one of his patients, everyone Hannibal ever smiled at, if it would make him stay.

These feelings are not new, but their fervor is. He's panting when they part.

"I've been giving our puzzle some thought," Hannibal tells him, clearing his throat. He rubs a hand over his mouth and Will watches him do it; he's never seen that tic before. It troubles him more than he thinks it should, and feels like assimilation; Hannibal is absorbing Will, osmotic, and with it will come Will's savagery, his insecurity, his pain.

But he swallows, and nods, ready. "Yeah?"

"You, still, see me as something unattainable, despite my best efforts," Hannibal says. Will swallows again, and hopes his mouth will dry, soon. His saliva tastes like poison and he thinks he can feel it, bubbling up in his lungs, souring his blood. Wonders if Hannibal can smell it. "There is a separation, between your life, and mine."

Will winces, looking down.

"I know you are not ready to socialize with my peer group, and I don't blame you. They can be boring at the best of times, and downright obnoxious at others. Yet, because of this, you see my life, and the time we are apart, as opportunities lost – both to sate your need to own me, and your need to know me."

Will folds his arms across his chest, gritting his teeth. "What's your point?"

Hannibal smiles, though it's a small thing, and Will blinks and sucks in a breath when Hannibal cups his face and lifts his eyes.

"I will prove myself to you," Hannibal says. Will's eyes widen, and he wants to shake his head, because that's not -. That's not the point. Is it? Hannibal has nothing to prove, he doesn't, he -. "There is a practice, rendered archaic by modern standards, but in the past it was common, between Alphas and Omegas, as a means for the Alpha to prove that they were worthy of being mated with."

Will frowns. "Are you...? Are you saying you want to hunt me?" he asks.

Hannibal's smile widens, a flash of pride in his eyes at Will's sharp insight. "That, my daydreamer," he purrs, and brushes his thumb over Will's jaw, "is exactly what I'm proposing."

Will's frown deepens, and he cannot deny the shiver that runs down his spine at the idea. "I'm not an Omega," he says, weakly.

"I know that, darling," Hannibal replies, and lets his hand fall. Will aches for its return, and swallows back his whine. "But I believe the response will be the same. To know that I am willing to chase you, and prove myself to you, and claim you as mine..." He trails off, head tilted.

"Another game," Will breathes, his eyes wide. This is what they are – the daydreamer and the Shadow Man, always chasing, always pursuing each other, playing their games and their riddles at their whims and regardless for the laws of regular men.

Hannibal nods. His smile is wide, and shows teeth.

Will swallows. "What are the rules?" he breathes, stepping closer.

Hannibal lets out a soft purr, lashes lowered when Will touches his chest. "When I leave, you will run," he says, and Will shivers. "Run wherever you would like to. Cross state lines. When Thursday comes, I will begin my hunt. And I will find you."

"What if you can't?" Will asks.

Hannibal's head tilts, and his smile is wide, mirth returning to him in an expression Will knows well – that confident, self-assuredness he can only dream of having. "I will," he says. "I promise, my love, I will."

And Will wants to trust in that. Wants to believe.

"If I have not found you by Monday, consider the game done," Hannibal says, conceding in the face of Will's hesitance. Will presses his lips together – so short a time? Three days, four at a stretch, where Will could go anywhere?

But Will swallows, and nods, because there is one thing he and Hannibal absolutely have in common:

They both like to see what will happen.

"I accept your terms, Shadow Man," he whispers, and Hannibal smiles, and purrs, and leans in to cup Will's face and kiss him chastely.

"The game starts now," he says, and he turns, and leaves. Will watches him go, his heart in his throat.

He could go anywhere.

He could go *anywhere*.

Will packs a suitcase, haphazard and rushed, and then hesitates as he hears Winston and Addy scrambling around in the kitchen, whining for breakfast.

"Shit," he mutters, and rubs a hand over his face. He gathers the dogs and drives to the dog park, where he remembers Molly telling him Elijah took his Husky mix in the mornings. Elijah is there, and gives Will a surprised, pleased smile, lifting his hand in a wave as Will rushes over.

"Hey," he says.

"Good morning, Will," Elijah replies, smiling. "Are you alright? You and Hannibal disappeared last night, quite suddenly."

"Yeah, I'm -. Um." Will clears his throat, sheepish, but in no mood to dally. "I know this is really last minute, and I'm sorry, but could you watch Winston and Addy for a few days? A week at most. I got called to Baltimore for a consultation and I have to leave, like, an hour ago."

"Oh." Elijah blinks, and smiles down at the dogs as they join in a game of wrestling and rolling in the grass with Elijah's dog. "Sure. No problem."

Will smiles at him, widely, and even purrs for good measure; he appreciates Elijah's accepting nature, and would see it rewarded. Predictably, the Omega flushes, shifting his weight, and lets out a happy trill of his own, naturally pleased at the sound of a happy Alpha.

"Thank you so much," Will says, and nods to him, already backing away. "Seriously, I owe you big. Babysitting, dinner, you name it! I'll be back as soon as I can."

He makes the promises in a rush, and instantly regrets them, but that's a problem for later-Will, and present-Will has already landed himself in extremely uncharted territory of a situation, and can worry about it later.

He gets back into his car, pulls away from the parking lot, and heads South, with no real direction in mind. He might go to Virginia, he thinks – or maybe he should be going North, where the forests are heavy and dense, and Hannibal will not be able to find him. He pulls up to a drive-thru ATM and withdraws three hundred dollars in cash.

Hannibal knows how to track credit cards, he's sure.

He drives South, through the Beltway, into Virginia. To the I-95, past D.C., past Fredericksburg, past Richmond. Then, West, towards Roanoke. He pauses long enough to fill up at a gas station, pays with his card, and then zigzags North again.

If Hannibal wants to chase him, Will can certainly make it interesting.

Chapter 2

There are two people in the backseat of his car when he returns from filling up at a gas station in West Virginia. Cash only, this time. He feels like a shark circling a school of fish, waiting for the right opening to dart in and take his meal. He opens the driver-side door and settles in with a sigh, and then turns his rearview mirror.

Two pairs of eyes stare back at him, both of them familiar in the way old wounds ache when bad weather approaches. The girl, with her long, flat black hair, summer sky eyes and that same pale scarf wrapped around her neck, smiles at him in sheepish welcome. *Abigail*.

Beside her sits a boy, an Alpha. His hair is brown, earth-toned, short-cropped and thick, his cheekbones sharp, eyes a pretty, dark brown and Will stares at him, stares and wonders when John started looking so much like Hannibal in his mind. Or if, perhaps, there was always some similarity, some basic coding in his brain that tells him what he's attracted to, that Hannibal took happy advantage of. If he saw Will when he was starry-eyed and crushing in the way eight-year-olds have crushes, and thought to himself that John bore a coincidental likeness to him when he was young.

John meets his eyes, and lifts his hand in a little wave, fingers curling in a way that reminds Will of Elijah. "Hey, kid," he murmurs.

Will swallows, and smiles, turning in his seat to look at both of them. "Hey," he croaks, eyes darting between them. "It's, ah." He nods to Abigail. "It's been a while."

"Yeah," she replies. Her smile widens, eyes shining under the harsh gas station lights. "You look good."

"Hannibal's been good for you," John supplies.

Will sighs, closing his eyes, and settles into place in his seat. He turns the car on and drives back onto the highway, directionless for now. "I'm not so sure," he says. Yes, Hannibal makes him happy, makes him sick with joy, makes Will feel like he could conquer the world, and yet, in the same breath, Will is so young, so inexperienced with things like love and relationships. So Goddamn *innocent*, it makes him angry, makes him want to rip and tear, claw and bite.

Abigail sits forward and puts a hand on Will's shoulder. "Yes, you are," she says, and Will sighs. He wants to close his eyes, wants to think, but forces himself to drive on.

John appears, in the passenger seat, and turns and smiles at Will. He looks just as Will remembers him, but seems so dainty now, so fragile. Will thinks about how small he must have been as a child, for John had seemed ten feet tall and like he could conquer the world.

"How did it feel?" he asks John. "To die?"

John tilts his head, and smiles, that wide, charming smile that Will remembers. Will's heart aches, John looks so much like he imagines Hannibal did when he was younger – he imagines Hannibal at sixteen, imagines him at twenty. Imagines how he might have reacted at seeing Hannibal when he was eight years old, for as Hannibal conquers him now, he would have devastated Will at that age.

"I don't remember," John replies. "It's been too long."

Will nods – it would be unfair, he supposes. After all, his subconscious has no idea what it feels like to die. He tightens his hand on the wheel.

"Why are you here?" he whispers.

Abigail sighs, and squeezes his shoulder. It's the most solid she's ever felt. "You're trying to defend yourself," she murmurs. "Prepared for the possibility that your mate will have to make room, in your mind. That you will need distance."

Will grits his teeth, shakes his head. "No," he argues weakly. "No, that's not -."

"You conjured me," John says. "The first Alpha you loved. The only Alpha you loved, besides him." He touches his face, and huffs a laugh. "I didn't even look like this. You know that."

Will shakes his head again, sharply. "That's not -." But he can't argue with himself, isn't that madness? It feels like madness. He swallows, a harsh burn behind his eyes. He growls, and turns West, back towards Maryland.

They are silent, for a long time. Then, John says; "What would make you happy, Will?"

Will sighs. "I don't know."

"To own him?" Abigail supplies. "He always calls the shots, always has. Wouldn't it be nice to be the one in control for once?"

But Will knows how to be in control. He knows how to grind Hannibal to dust, how to growl or bare his teeth to get Hannibal to react. Is that control? He feels like it should be. But yes, yes, he cannot deny that it would be nice, it would be so fucking nice, to even have a shred of Hannibal's confidence, his assuredness.

John smiles at him, and heaves a gentle sigh. His eyes close and he leans back against the headrest. "This is exhausting," he murmurs.

Abigail huffs a laugh. "You'll get used to it."

Will winces. He doesn't want to get used to it – it feels wrong, to bring them back into his world, into his life. They should be allowed to rest in peace, they should be allowed to sleep. And Will doesn't want to share those pieces of himself, he doesn't want to bring these ghosts into his mind, to sour space that only Hannibal should be occupying.

He closes his eyes, just for a blink, and when he opens them, they're gone. He drives on.

It occurs to him, somewhere on the Pennsylvania turnpike, that he's doing this all wrong.

He pulls the car off at a rest stop, killing the engine, and sits, looking down at his hands. He's been driving for hours, and exhaustion is pulling at the backs of his eyelids. It's dark, now, has been for a while, and he watches as headlights cross next to him, people coming and going from the rest stop, rejoining the rest of the traffic on the road.

This isn't right.

Hannibal had said the chase was about proving yourself, as an Alpha. Well, Will's a Goddamn Alpha. And he's the one with his childish, ridiculous insecurities. He's always been the one pursued, the one monitored, and watched, and chased. Hannibal has never needed to. If he wanted Will, if he was a weaker man, he could have come for Will when he was a child. He could have come for him at sixteen, when he first presented. At eighteen, when he moved away from home. At twenty-two, when he graduated college. He could have, but he didn't, because he was building this place for them or wanted Will to learn and whatever else he'd told Will over the years.

He has always wanted Will. That much is clear, but his need for informed consent, his need for propriety, had stayed his hand. Only Will's actions, his ember-flame of passion, his need for Hannibal to finally emerge and make himself known, had spurred him to action.

And yet -.

An idea flickers, half-formed and lacking borders, in the back of Will's mind.

He turns his car back on, drives back onto the turnpike, then off at the nearest exist. Though it's dark, the hour itself is not too late, and thankfully the tired-looking clerk behind the counter lets him scribble his letter and mail it.

He sends it to Hannibal's address, a torn-out piece of his notebook inside covered with his tilting scrawl;

"Shadow Man,

I'm not a child anymore. I am not something to be pursued. It's your turn to practice empathy. Good luck."

This is not Hannibal's game, not anymore, it's Will's. It should have always been Will's. Had he been more aware, from the beginning, he could have used it to his advantage. He's sure he could have lit a flame in Hannibal just as bright, just as consuming. Hannibal had killed John because he was Will's friend, to see what would happen.

What would have happened, had Will taken that drunk Omega to bed during his senior year?

What would have happened, had Will kissed Alana when they'd graduated, had asked her out and dated her and called her his wife?

What would have happened, had Will stopped writing?

It doesn't matter. They are here now, and Will's science is sound. He's an Alpha, he has power over his mate, controls his heart and his hands as Hannibal had said. And now, now it's time Hannibal learned what it feels like to be watched, to be left unknowing, and waiting, for his monster to come to him.

He gasses up his car, drives to the nearest motel, and checks in for the night.

He wakes to his phone ringing. It's Hannibal, and Will groans, checking the time on the little red-blinking clock on the side table. It's almost noon. Will's shoulder aches and his back is sore from the uncomfortable bed.

He answers the phone.

"Will." Hannibal sounds breathless, sounds entranced, like Will has cast some kind of spell on him. "I got your letter."

Will smiles. "That's not the game, sweetheart," he purrs, pleased when he hears Hannibal's breath catch.

Hannibal swallows, and whispers; "Daydreamer." Will purrs again, rolling onto his back, running a hand through his hair. "I received your letter."

Will's smile widens. "These are the rules, Shadow Man," he says, and can almost feel Hannibal perking up, imagines him clutching his phone, Will's letter in his shaking hand. It's Wednesday, now – Will doesn't have a lot of time. "You're going to stay in Baltimore. You will go about your business, as usual, but this weekend you will throw a dinner party, or go to the Opera, whatever it is you do when I'm not there. And I will be watching, to make sure you obey."

He doesn't know where this confidence comes from, but feels it prowling; catches Shadow Man's essence and channels it through his voice. He recalls how he'd felt, trembling and desperate with the blindfold around his eyes the first night Hannibal came to him. Their first kiss, the first touch of Hannibal's hot hand on his cheek.

"You will wait for me," he continues, "as I waited for you. Until I decide you are ready."

Hannibal doesn't speak, but his silence is deafening. Will's spine feels hot.

He sucks in a breath, licks his lips, and blinks at the popcorn ceiling. Sees a section of it, peeling, ready to fall. "I'll prove myself to you."

Hannibal breathes out; a soft whine. It makes Will's chest ache, his teeth itch. He growls, and clenches his fingers around his phone, rubbing his free hand through his hair again and cradling his head with it, the picture of ease even though every muscle in his body is tense, ready to give chase, ready to hunt.

"Do you accept my terms, Shadow Man?" he asks, in the wake of Hannibal's silence.

Hannibal swallows, loud enough Will hears it. "Yes, my daydreamer," he replies, and in his voice is a thousand years of longing, a burning sun of love, and Will smiles, and closes his eyes.

"Good," he says. "I'll see you soon."

He goes to Baltimore. Knowing Alana is not there, knowing he has no friends in the city aside from his mate, makes the skyline of it appear foreboding, and yet Will is alight with anticipation. He drives to a part of the city removed from Hannibal's suburb, but close enough that he could walk there within an hour or so, and checks into a hotel. He pays for three nights, using his card, sure that Hannibal will obey him and will not come looking.

He spends most of the Wednesday afternoon refamiliarizing himself with the city. He drives past Hannibal's office, and past his home, seeing the windows dark and the building clearly empty. Hannibal is likely at his appointments.

He parks, and gets out of the car, and lets himself in. Hannibal gave him a key the first night Will spent here, and he enters the building with familiar ease. He knows this place; knows the walls, knows the spread of hallway to kitchen, to dining room, to the study.

He smiles, breathing in deep the scent of his mate. His own scent is soft, barely-lingering. It is a mix of caramel and chocolate, mint and fevered sweetness. He runs his hands through his hair, down either side of his neck, and starts his work.

He spreads his hands along the trim on the wall, rubs his face against Hannibal's coats. He goes to the dining room, sighs and touches each chair. Sits in Hannibal's seat at the head of the table for a while, absently petting the arms of the chair, the comfortable cushion.

Then, he rises, and goes to Hannibal's bedroom.

The tie he'd worn the night of the social is wrapped up neatly, just visible at the top of his hamper. It is a soft blue, with swirls of white, and Will takes it, wraps it around his knuckles, breathes in the clinging scent of Hannibal's cologne.

He goes to the bed.

Absently, he's aware that this isn't like Hannibal's game. This is much more brazen, much more invasive, but that is what Will is; he is a predator, a conqueror in his own right, and if their positions were reversed, he knows he would have been much harsher in his courtship,

more devastating with his love. Will is a weak man, he'll admit it; there are things he craves to do, things his instincts demand he do, that Hannibal would never dare.

But that's what makes this fun. If they were the same, life would be much less interesting.

He sits on the bed, kicks off his shoes, and then slithers into place in the center, on his back, his eyes on the dark ceiling. He bites his lower lip, closes his eyes, and drags his nails down his chest, pushes his knuckles wrapped in Hannibal's tie below the waistband of his jeans, into his underwear, and wraps his fingers around his hardening cock.

He breathes in Hannibal's scent, turns his head and presses deep into the pillows. His stomach clenches, his chest grows tight and hot, and he growls, itching for the warm flesh of his mate between his teeth, aching for Hannibal's heat, his strength. He's leaking already, incensed by the presence of his mate, the soft drag of Hannibal's tie between his fingers as he touches himself.

He digs his other hand into his neck, over Hannibal's bites, digs in and presses down until it hurts. He thinks of all the times he touched himself, imagining Shadow Man's hands on him, imagining his teeth. He rolls onto his belly, fucking his fist, pulling his cock free so it smears sticky-wet on Hannibal's sheets, and bites his pillow, wetting it with his saliva.

He imagines Hannibal's hands on his back, imagines his weight covering Will, teeth at his neck, Hannibal's snarls filling his ears. He breathes deep, whimpers, tightens his hand and fists his free one in the sheets, wanting to tear them, to rip them to shreds.

He finishes with a gasp, staining the sheets, staining Hannibal's tie, and lifts himself to his knees, pushing his cock back into his clothes and admiring the sheen of his seed, shining and slick on Hannibal's pale tie. He smiles, viscerally satisfied, and folds the tie, leaving it on the bedside table.

He wipes his dirty hand on Hannibal's pillow, and rises, and closes the door behind him as he leaves. He goes to Hannibal's study, finds one of his notebooks covered half-within with physics equations, and smiles, a blossom of affectionate warmth in his chest.

He turns to the last page, finds a pen, and sits at the dining room table again.

He writes;

"Shadow Man,

Forgive the intrusion. I'm not as strong as you are."

He weighs the book down with a set of coasters, so that his writing is the first thing Hannibal will see. He brushes his hands across his neck, smears his scent and the tacky cling of his seed along Hannibal's table, and then rises again, and leaves Hannibal's house.

He waits, in the darkness, his car still at the hotel so it doesn't draw attention. He's outside Hannibal's office, sees the light still on, sees the hunch of Hannibal as he leans over his desk, undoubtedly recording his observations and updates on his latest patient. Will had seen the man leave – a round, puppy-like Omega whose eyes were shining and who kept looking over his shoulder towards Hannibal's office as though reluctant to leave.

Entertains, briefly, the thought of hunting that Omega down and snapping his neck.

He swallows, trying to control those urges. Hannibal is the epitome of control, and only kills those who deserve it. He's sure that patient doesn't deserve it, for what Omega wouldn't have Hannibal's attention on them for an hour at a time and not feel the quivering, frantic desire to show his neck, to go to his knees, to do anything to have such a powerful Alpha touch him, and kiss him, and call that Omega his?

Will's upper lip twitches as Hannibal rises, working his head from side to side to ease the tension in his neck. He places his book on one side of his desk, and dons his coat. Will watches him turn off the lights, waits, breathless, for him to emerge from the entryway.

His breath catches as he sees Hannibal again. He's beautiful, tall and regal and everything Will could ever want in a mate. His fingers curl, and he shifts, using the cover of darkness and a tree to shield him from sight, though he is downwind and knows Hannibal cannot smell him on the breeze. The night is cold, and Hannibal's breath mists as he goes to his car. He pauses, seeing the white flutter of the note Will left him there.

He looks up, looks around, and Will is sure he can feel Will's eyes on him, as Will felt Shadow Man's eyes, all throughout his life. His lips twitch in a smile, his shoulders rolling in eager anticipation, and he takes the letter, unfolding it.

Will could lunge for him, then, in a single moment of distraction. His prey is vulnerable, exposed in the open air. There's nowhere for him to run, nowhere for him to hide. Will's teeth itch. He watches Hannibal read his words.

"Shadow Man," he had written, "what does being in love feel like?"

Hannibal smiles, and gets into his car. Will watches, watches the lights turn on, shift into reverse. Watches Hannibal pull back from his parking space, brake lights glowing, and then shift into drive. He waits, until those lights disappear.

His phone rings.

He smiles, and answers. "Hi, sweetheart," he murmurs, as he heads to Hannibal's office. Hannibal didn't lock the door – perhaps he knew, as Will did, that Will would come. Meant to leave the door open for his monster to prowl through.

Will goes into the office, listening to the thrum of Hannibal's car, the soft sound of his breathing. He smiles again. "Well?"

"It feels like hunger, daydreamer," Hannibal replies. "Loving you makes me capable of anything; earning your smile, your laughter, brings me joy unrivaled by anything else in my

life." Will hums, and turns on the lamp on Hannibal's desk, which is a softer glow than the overhead lights. He sees, on a table unviewable from the outside, a bottle of wine and a glass. He goes to it, opens the bottle and pours himself one.

"I didn't ask what loving *me* felt like," he replies. "Just love, in general."

"They are one and the same," Hannibal says softly. "I have been in love with you since you were a child, Will."

Will growls, hissing in warning.

Hannibal understands; "Forgive me, daydreamer."

Will smiles, and takes a sip of wine. It's thick and heavy on his tongue, almost unbearably sweet. He presses the edge of the glass to his lips, taps it to his teeth, absently, before he takes another drink. "I forgive you, Shadow Man," he replies.

"I miss you terribly, darling," Hannibal says, and Will's fingers curl, flex around the glass. "Will you visit me, tonight?"

Will huffs a laugh, bares his teeth in a savage smile, knowing what is waiting for Hannibal when he comes home. "No," he replies, purring the word. "Not tonight, sweetheart. You have to be patient."

He hears Hannibal swallow, hears him try and stifle a whine. He smiles. "Being hunted is its own kind of torture, isn't it?"

"On the contrary, knowing you are pursuing me is the highest flattery I can imagine," Hannibal replies. Will hums, and takes another drink, killing the glass. He sets it down and pours himself another, and then goes to Hannibal's chair, the thick-padded one with the wide armrests he sits in when he's with a patient. "My pride, and my regard for you, has never been higher."

Will huffs, and sits. "Do you believe, even now, my behavior is a product of your design?"

"You blame me for what you are," Hannibal replies. "By that logic, everything you do is because of me."

Isn't that the problem? Isn't that the point? "I suppose."

"Again, I feel compelled to tell you, I find none of these things to be flaws."

"You're biased," Will replies, but he's smiling. "Are you home yet?"

"Almost."

"Good," he purrs. "Don't call me until the morning."

"As you wish, my daydreamer."

Will sleeps in Hannibal's office, curled up in his chair, so that by the time it rounds to four in the morning, his scent has been buried into the leather and fabric, so deeply he knows Hannibal will smell it. He rises, and his phone rings as he leaves the office. He frowns down at his phone, not recognizing the number.

"Hello?"

"Will!" It's Alana's voice. She's in Greece, now, from the source of her last postcard. Will smiles, hearing her voice. "How are you? I'm sorry to have called so early but I figured, knowing you, you'd be awake."

Will smiles. He's awake, very awake, and feels vibrant and alive. "You got me," he replies, laughing as he pulls his coat tight around him, bracing himself against the cold, and starts to walk back towards his hotel. "How's Rhodes?"

"Oh, it's *beautiful*," Alana says. "This is definitely one of the places I want to come back to, with you and Hannibal and Margot. The beaches are lovely, and everyone is so friendly, and the buildings are gorgeous, it's..." She sighs. "It's like paradise."

"Sounds wonderful," he replies quietly, wincing when the wind picks up as he crosses between two sets of the buildings, a cross breeze digging into his cheeks and chilling his exposed hand around his phone. "What's left in the tour?"

"We're going to Spain, next, and then finishing off in Paris," Alana says, and Will can tell she's grinning. "I swear, I think I've gained twenty pounds in the last three months alone."

Will laughs. "You know there are ways to burn off those calories."

"Don't be gross," Alana says.

"Hey! I was talking about sightseeing, you pervert," Will replies, though they both know he wasn't talking about that at all. She laughs again, and Will can practically hear her eyeroll. "Though I certainly hope you haven't been neglecting your wifely duties."

"Shut *up*," Alana gripes, playfully, "I can assure you with absolute certainty that Margot is *more* than satisfied with my *wifely duties*." Will grins, ducking his head, and dips into the little awning above a convenience store, to get out of the wind. He shifts his phone to his other hand and shoves his free one into his pocket to warm it. "And how are you, hmm? How's Hannibal?"

Will smiles. "Peachy," he replies.

She hums, and pauses. Then; "You're up to something."

He laughs. "What?"

"You have that tone of voice, like you're plotting."

"Oh, come on, you have spies now? You can't even see me rubbing my hands together and cackling."

"You're an asshole," Alana says, but she's laughing. "Well, good luck with whatever it is you crazy sex fiends get up to when I'm not around. Margot's taking me on a day-trip to Turkey, so I have to leave soon."

"Have fun," Will says.

"You too," she replies with another laugh. The call ends, and Will huffs, rolling his eyes. He does *not* have a plotting voice, though to say he feels wicked, and savage right now, isn't that much of a stretch.

He makes it another block before his phone rings again, and he smiles, answering it quickly. "Good morning, Shadow Man."

Hannibal is breathing heavily, panting, a snarl in it, and Will freezes, closing his eyes as the sound washes over him, tightening his shoulders and making his spine feel warm and rigid. He ducks into another alley, presses his back to the brick wall, and growls in reply.

"I take it you found my present."

"You are a cruel, insolent creature," Hannibal snarls. Will smiles, showing teeth, imagines Hannibal with his face buried in the pillow Will bit, and spread his scent on. Imagines Hannibal with his tie in his fist, pressed close to his mouth, his other hand frantically tugging on his cock. Of course, he doesn't have enough hands for that, with his phone so close to his ear.

He imagines Hannibal sitting at his dining room table, fucking through Will's dried seed and soaking himself in Will's scent. Imagines him touching Will's handwriting, imagines he might have had a glass or two of wine, tried to calm his nerves, before eventually giving up.

Maybe he only just found his bedroom in the state Will left it. Maybe he knew what he would find, and resisted, and resisted, until he couldn't anymore, and isn't that just a delicious thought.

"Are you touching yourself right now, sweetheart?" Will whispers, biting his lower lip when Hannibal's breath hitches, and he snarls. "Does it enrage you, to know I was there, in your home, and covered it with my scent, only to deny you when you asked for me?"

Hannibal growls, and Will hears the creak of furniture. Wooden, solid. He's in the dining room.

"I want to be everywhere," Will snarls. "I want to be in every inhale, every beat of your heart. I want to set your mind on fire, unignorable. You won't be able to divide your attention anywhere, if I have my way."

Hannibal's exhale is juddering, heavy like the grind of rocks. Will bites his lower lip, his hips rolling. He wants to touch himself as well, to the sound of Hannibal's heavy breathing, the sound of his growls, but the night is too cold and he's too exposed, out here.

He presses the heel of his hand against his erection and shivers.

"Do you feel empty?" he gasps, and knows his voice is low, thick with arousal, knows Hannibal is getting off on it, just as much an audiophile as he is sensitive to every other thing Will does. "Do your lungs ache? Are you hungry?"

"Ravenous," Hannibal breathes. He's close; Will would recognize the shake in his breath, the rumble of his voice, anywhere.

"I want to sate you, Shadow Man," Will says. "I want to fill every part of you." He pauses, digs his tongue behind his teeth and tilts his head back. "Every part."

"Oh, Will, *yes*," Hannibal moans, and he goes, for a moment, totally silent. Will doesn't even have the heart to correct him, to warn him against breaking the rules again. He hears Hannibal as his orgasm sweeps over him, closes his eyes and imagines Hannibal's head tilted back, his eyes all black and red, lashes lowered. Recalls to his memory the way Hannibal's jaw clenches, his hands tighten, imagines the way his seed looks staining his hand, imagines that he came so hard he dirtied his clothes up to his chest.

Will trembles, aching on the inside with the need to run to his mate, to push his hands through Hannibal's hair, down his neck, to whisper, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry' and beg for forgiveness and let Hannibal touch him, let their lips meet. He wants it so badly he can barely see when he opens his eyes.

He forces his hand away from his cock, forces his breathing to calm, his head to cool. Purrs, instead; "Have a good day, sweetheart," and knows he sounds as breathless, as ruined, as Hannibal does. "I'll see you soon."

"Will – daydreamer, please." Will hesitates, and doesn't end the call. Listens, as Hannibal steadies his breathing, tries to control his voice; "I can't bear this. This separation from you, it is torture."

Will smiles. "I had to bear it for twenty-seven years," he replies quietly. "This is the final stage in my evolution, Shadow Man. Be proud to witness it."

It is Thursday night, and since Hannibal is not scheduled to travel to Will's house, Will follows him to the Baltimore Opera House instead. His eyes narrow, seeing signs for a charity concert framing the stairs leading up to the main doors, and he shivers, and waits, until the main doors close and it seems the concert has begun.

He sneaks in, years of practice in navigating through houses unnoticed and many nights of prowling, and years of being careful with his placement and reception of Shadow Man's letters helping him creep past the few straggling socialites, the single usher in attendance by one of the doors. He goes to the far one, and cracks it open at the back, slipping in before the light can bother any of the audience members.

He spies Hannibal immediately, trained with eager eyes to spot his mate in a crowded room. There are rows and rows of chairs, set in two clusters on either side of an aisle. Violin music fills the air and a woman, dressed and wreathed in gold with fiery red hair, has started an aria.

Will takes a seat in the very back, behind Hannibal's chair and out of any immediate line of sight. He sits, noting a few people casting him disapproving looks for his state of down-dress, and slouches in his seat, folding his arms across his chest.

He watches Hannibal, able to see the outer frames of his head from between those sat in the rows separating them. Sees the high white of his collar, and his lip twitches, knowing the bites he left on Hannibal's neck will be hidden from sight. Hannibal's head tilts, his attention caught, and Will freezes, prepared to move so he's out of line of sight, but Hannibal merely tilts his head and looks over his shoulder.

Will follows his eyes, sees the same puppy-like Omega jostling in his seat like a toddler needing to go to the bathroom. Sees him wave, frantically, at Hannibal when their eyes meet.

Hannibal gives him a nod of recognition, and turns his attention away.

Will snarls, and it's mercifully hidden by the singer's high note. He stands as the song begins to die, his actions hidden by the standing ovation she receives, and slips out of the room. He goes to the guest services desk and approaches the squirrelly, young Alpha standing behind it, dressed in what has to be an older brother's suit, too big for him in the shoulders and overflowing down his wrists.

"Would it be possible to get a message to one of the patrons of the concert tonight?" he asks the boy, reading his nametag. "Jacob?"

"Oh! Um, yes, during the intermission," Jacob says, nodding. Will wonders if there's something on his face, in his demeanor, that is inherently threatening, because Jacob seems terrified of him. "Who do you need to contact?"

"His name is Doctor Lecter," Will says, and Jacob nods, looking down at a list in front of him. "Could you just have him call me, during the intermission?"

"Of course, Sir," Jacob says with another wide-eyed nod. "Who should I say asked?"

Will smiles. "I'm his mate," he replies, and Jacob nods. The glass separating them, Will is sure, dulls his scent. "Thank you. Have a good night." Then he turns, and leaves, slipping out just as quietly as he arrived.

He walks away from the Opera House, towards a small park he had passed on his way here. At his left appears John, at his right, Abigail. He smiles at them in turn and they grin back at

him, and he goes into the park, shivering in the cold and the dark, and plops himself down on a bench.

It's beginning to rain, the fall weather coming full force, blown in by storms from the sea, and Will sighs, closing his eyes, tucks his heels against the edge of the bench and tilts his head up, blinking up at the stars, at the cloud that forms on his exhale.

Abigail hums to herself beside him, playing with her hair, and John is sitting, slouched like Will remembers him, in the kind of chaotic sprawl every Alpha seems to form with ease. His eyes rake John up and down; he's unblemished and unbroken from Hannibal's hand, from his teeth, and his knife. He looks whole and healthy, just with a vague pallor that Will's ghosts have.

John lolls his head, grins at him wide and warm. "What's on your mind, kid?" he asks, and Will huffs a laugh – he's older than John will ever be, but that's what John used to call him. In his presence, his mind conjures that nickname in John's soft, soothing voice. Colors his eyes red, watches the sink of John's fangs into his lower lip as he waits for Will to answer.

Will sighs. "I'm sorry he killed you," he murmurs. "I'm sorry that had to happen." For it did have to happen, but it could have happened to anyone. Wrong place, wrong time, wrong friends. Looking back on it, Will is amazed Hannibal allowed his friendship with Alana to grow so strong. Unless, of course, he saw her as a means to get closer to Will. Such a thing is not beyond him, Will is sure.

"Are you going to leave him?" Abigail asks, her eyes glassy and wide when Will turns to look at her.

And Will frowns, and shakes his head. "Of course not," he replies. "This is just...another experiment. Another game. If I lose, we try again. Until we get it right."

Because Hannibal loves him. Will knows this, knows this like compass directions and the heat behind his eyes. He loves him the only way he knows how, the only way he has ever known how and Will, with his youth and his innocence, didn't know enough to tell him to change his ways. Didn't know enough to be anything more than simply thankful, simply in love, but the world is dark and full of monsters and he's not a child anymore.

"What are you afraid of?" John asks, and smiles. "There's no witch, kid. I made her up."

Will knows this, too. There is no house in the woods behind his home. Just that letterbox, which he removed, and now sits nailed to his front door.

He licks his lips, and wraps his arms around his knees. "He will devour me, if I let him."

"You can devour him, if you want to," Abigail replies. "He'd let you." She lifts her eyes away, stares out to the dark trees, the stretch of mown grass, the little twinkle of illumination in the form of house lights on the other side of the park. How homely, how gentle this night is, perfect for the monsters to come out and hunt.

"Just like your father did?" he asks.

Abigail huffs, and smiles at him. "My father loved me," she says. "Above all else."

"Just as Hannibal loves me," Will murmurs. "Above all else. Your father killed you."

Abigail nods, not arguing. "I was too small, and weak, to defend myself. Taken by surprise. You're not."

"Because he made sure you weren't," John adds. Will nods, and rests his chin on his forearms, lifting his eyes to the sky. He shivers in the cold, and closes his eyes, bowing his head so his forehead touches his knuckles.

"I hate feeling like this," he tells them.

"Feeling like what?" John asks.

"Like a child."

"And why do you feel like a child?" Abigail murmurs. "He told you to learn. You know things children should not know. Have done things children cannot do. You are not a *child* to him, Will, you are an idol."

Maybe that's the problem.

Maybe that's the point.

His phone rings, suddenly enough that he flinches, and he straightens, fishing it out from his pocket and answering without looking at the Caller ID. He knows who it is.

He says nothing, merely sucks in a breath and tries to control the whine that wants to spill from his throat. This is exhausting – how did Hannibal manage this for so long? On the other end of the line, Hannibal sighs, and says; "You came to my office."

Will nods, swallowing. "I didn't like the thought of leaving you alone."

Hannibal purrs for him, and Will sags, wiping a hand over his face, over his mouth. "Are you lonely, Shadow Man?" he asks.

"You once wrote to me, and said that there is a difference between being alone and being lonely," Hannibal replies, his voice soft, so gentle. Will closes his eyes, imagines Hannibal's mouth at his neck, his hands resting over Will's heart. His fingers curl. "I have not felt alone since finding you, but loneliness...yes. That, I feel greatly, right now."

"I don't want you to be lonely."

"Then come to me, daydreamer," Hannibal replies, his voice taking on a breathless, desperate edge. "Please."

Will smiles. "How is the concert?"

Hannibal pauses. Then, "The aria moved me to tears. In her song, I felt longing and need, such feelings I associate intimately with you." He pauses again, then; "Did you see me? Were you watching?"

"For a time," Will replies, confession-quiet. "Who is that Omega?"

Hannibal huffs. "His name is Franklyn," he says. "He's a patient of mine."

"He behaves like an untrained puppy around you," Will hisses, a sharp flare of jealous indignation, of wounded pride, swirling in his chest. "Does he entertain you, Shadow Man?"

"In the same way a passing circus might," Hannibal says. "But you are that aria, Will. You move my soul."

Will swallows, and digs his free hand against his thigh. "How did you do this?" he demands, harsh, breathless. "Every moment spent apart from you feels like torture, worse than when I was a kid, worse than every letter, every gift. I would tear the world apart to be with you again."

Hannibal purrs, and answers; "I would love nothing more. But I am here, my daydreamer. I am waiting for you." He hesitates, and says, "Will you visit me, tonight?"

Will wants to. He wants to, wants to.

He stands. "Stay where you are," he says, and hangs up the phone. John and Abigail aren't with him anymore.

He sprints back to the Opera House, and sees Hannibal on the stairs, fidgeting with his phone, sitting on the steps as the rain soaks him through. He freezes, at a halt, at the bottom of the steps, and Hannibal's eyes flash to him, and lock.

Will's eyes drop.

There's a golden ring on Hannibal's left hand.

Hannibal follows his line of sight, looks down at his hand, and stands, pocketing his phone and instead nervously twirling the band around on his finger, but he doesn't remove it. Will looks up, meets his eyes, tilts his head in question.

Hannibal offers him a hopeful smile, and holds out his hand.

Will goes to him, takes it, marveling at the warm, hard presence of gold. He touches the wedding ring, touches Hannibal's knuckles.

"What is this?" he whispers.

Hannibal smiles. "I wear it whenever I am not with you," he murmurs. Will's frown deepens. He would know if Hannibal had a wife, he would have noticed, surely. "I sing praises of my husband, the brilliant and beautiful Alpha who has captured my heart for so long."

Will blinks, and is breathless.

"So, everyone knows you're..."

"Yes," Hannibal says. "All of my friends, and all of my peers, know I am mated, and married. Without reservation." He huffs, a soft laugh. "They are eager to tell me how much I have changed, how it seems I have neglected them, preferring instead the company of my love."

Will can't speak. Doesn't dare breathe.

He lifts his eyes and sees Hannibal's shining, his cheeks flushed in the humidity brought by the rain. There sits, just-visible, one of Will's bites, the upper arch of it just above the collar of his shirt. Will licks his lips, ascends the final step, until he and Hannibal stand as equals.

"I didn't know," he whispers.

"I know, darling," Hannibal replies. "I didn't want to pressure you, or make you agree to something you weren't ready for."

Will huffs. That certainly sounds like Hannibal's M.O.

"Do you want to marry me?" he asks.

Hannibal's smile is wide, transcendent. He glows in the lights of the Opera house, regal and proud. "I think 'Hannibal Graham' has a certain ring to it, don't you?" he asks, playful, overjoyed. His scent is thick with caramel sweetness, and Will's mouth waters.

His eyes widen. "You'd take my name?" he asks, and wants to laugh, because it seems so absurd.

"Of course, darling," Hannibal replies. "I delight in your ownership of me."

How could Will not kiss him, then? He wraps his fingers in Hannibal's suit jacket, tugs him forward, and lifts his mouth to meet Hannibal as Hannibal growls, digging his nails into Will's flanks, crushing them together. It's passionate, it's eager, it's savage. Will's lip stings from Hannibal's bite, his mouth floods with saliva, his tongue curls behind Hannibal's teeth, eager to taste him.

He moans, pressing closer, desperate for Hannibal's heat to push away the chill of the air, to settle Will's mind and instincts, to lay claim once more. His neck hasn't felt Hannibal's teeth in days, his skin feels too-dry, bereft of his mate's touch, and his sweat.

Hannibal pulls back, his exhale heavy, and he cups Will's face with both hands, and his expression is a heady mix of joy and relief, to have Will in his arms again.

He tilts his head, claims Will's mouth again, and sighs. Will loves the feeling of the wedding ring against his cheek, and his fingers curl. He wonders, absently, if Hannibal already has a ring for him, if he has been waiting for the right time, the right opportunity, to present it.

"You are a wonderful hunter, my daydreamer," Hannibal breathes. "I would wear any mark you gave me, any claim you laid, proudly."

Will swallows, murmurs; "Anything?"

"Anything," Hannibal says with a nod.

Will smiles, and pulls back. "The hunt isn't over, Shadow Man," he says, and watches Hannibal's eyes flash, watches him press his lips together, his hands fluttering hesitantly to Will's shoulders. Knowing Hannibal has been wearing a ring all this time fills Will with a strange mix of emotions: pride, of course, to know his mate is so happy to be claimed in one of the most universally-known ways; surprise, that Hannibal didn't tell him; wary joy, because all these people know he exists, now, but they do not know *him*. It brings with it another opportunity to disappoint.

He shouldn't care. He doesn't care, but he does, because these are Hannibal's peers, and his friends, and they know more about him than he does about them and Will doesn't like that, his instincts rebel against having the lower hand again.

"I want you to throw a dinner party, this weekend," he says. "Invite whoever you'd like." Hannibal swallows, and nods. "And I will come."

Hannibal blinks, and his mouth splits into a wide, hopeful smile. "You will?" he asks.

Will nods. He cups Hannibal's left hand, and kisses his palm. Kisses his fingers, and the ring. "Yes," he replies. "I will come, but I want you to pretend you do not know me. Hide, as I felt I had to hide. I want to see you as a stranger, and meet your friends when they do not know how to behave around me."

Hannibal breathes out, his fingers curling beneath Will's jaw. "As you wish, daydreamer," he murmurs, and tugs Will into another kiss. He smiles. "There are many stories where the King disguises himself as one of the common folk. Is that your design, my love?"

Will smiles, and nods. He pulls back, aching in his jaws and his heart when they part from each other. "I look forward to receiving your invitation, Shadow Man," he says. "You know where to find me."

Then he turns, and walks down the stairs, pulling his collar up to shield his neck from the cold. He feels Hannibal's eyes burning into the back of his head the entire time, before he turns a corner, and robs Hannibal of the sight of him.

Once given permission, Will knows Hannibal runs his credit card to find out which hotel he's staying at. From there, it is not difficult to send Will an invitation. Will smiles, reading Hannibal's curling, arcing script, the same letters and dark lines he has spent so long reading and rereading, memorizing until they sear the backs of his eyelids.

"Dr. Hannibal Lecter requests the pleasure of your company for dinner, Saturday night, 7 p.m.," it reads. Will sleeps with it open by his bedside, and marvels at how so much has changed between the last time he received such a letter. The first dinner he and Hannibal shared, with Alana and Margot, where he knew he was about to step into Shadow Man's lair and never come back out.

He goes to a fancy wine store and locates a bottle of the kind of red Hannibal used to give him, after he presented and several times since. He's giddy with anticipation, and returns to his hotel room. He showers, shaves, and wants to laugh at himself, for back then, just under a year ago, he had been a mess of nerves and anxiety. Now, though, now he is strong. He is a monster in his own right, invading the land of the residents. Hannibal's hearth, his home, is his as much as Hannibal's. His Shadow Man, his Ripper, his *mate*.

His husband, if Will sees fit.

This is how he can present himself; a newcomer, a stray Alpha that must be Hannibal's acquaintance, or he wouldn't have been invited. He wonders if Hannibal will seat him at his normal place, to Hannibal's left. If he will put Will at the other end of the table, his equal in all things.

He checks out of his hotel, and drives back to Harrogate. He does not anticipate spending more than another night in Baltimore, and so he can collect the dogs. He drives to Elijah's house, finds him sitting outside despite the chill air, in a nest of blankets on a rocking chair on the porch, a steaming mug of tea in his hands. By his feet, Winston, Addy, and his own Husky mix are piled together, dozing.

Will's dogs perk up at the sight of his car, and Winston gives a little woof of greeting, disentangling himself from his fellows and running up to Will as he gets out of the car. Will smiles, kneeling down, petting his smooth face and soft ears, and kisses his forehead.

"Hey, buddy," he murmurs, and gives Addy the same treatment. He stands, as Elijah sets his tea down, unfolds his blankets, and approaches with a smile.

"Hi, Will," he says warmly.

"Hey," Will replies. "Thanks again for taking care of the dogs. I'm back now, I can take them off your hands."

Elijah nods, and then he hesitates, biting his lower lip. He shifts his weight and Will tilts his head, able to smell the odd, barely-there scent of something like nervousness coloring the Omega's coconut milk scent. "Everything alright?" he asks.

"Um, well, there's something I wanted to...to give you," Elijah says. He runs a hand through his hair. "Actually, Molly and I wanted to give you."

Will frowns.

"Wait here," Elijah says, one hand held up in a gesture asking Will to obey, and Will nods, absently petting Addy's muzzle as she licks at his hand. Elijah turns and disappears into the

house, emerging a moment later with a small black bag in his hand.

He hands it to Will, and Will takes it, pouring the contents into his palm. He gasps, and his eyes widen, meeting Elijah's earnest gaze, his shy smile.

"It was Molly's husband's," he says. Will looks down at it again. "She told me she wanted you to have it, after I told her about your mate."

"Elijah," he murmurs, and his fingers curl around the gold wedding band sitting in his palm. "I can't take this."

"Will, please," Elijah murmurs, earnest and sweet. He cups Will's hand with both his own, making Will's fingers curl tighter, accepting. "Please, take it. You've brought my family so much joy, and so much closure and happiness. With your help, we've finally been able to move on." He sucks in a breath, and lets it out. "Molly never took Wally anywhere. She was always afraid, too afraid that John's killer would come back. But because of you, she's not afraid anymore. Because of you, I feel like John is finally at rest."

Will swallows, looking down at their hands again. His throat feels thick, guilt and something cloying choking him. Elijah's earnest, sweet offer is so pure, so wholesome, Will thinks himself dirty, and might stain Elijah just by touching him, as he did with Alana, when he first fled to Harrogate after Abigail's death.

"I..." Will cannot say anything.

"He was about your size," Elijah murmurs, and lets go of Will's hands, sensing his surrender. "It should fit well enough, but I don't think getting it resized will be too much trouble if so."

"Elijah, I can't -." Will swallows, and shakes his head. "There aren't words."

Elijah smiles when Will lifts his head, meets his eyes. "John loved you like a little brother, Will," he says, and Will blinks, trying to fight back the sting of tears behind his irises. "And I think of you as family, because of him. Because of what you've done for mine. I want to see you happy, and I can see Hannibal makes you happy. So I want you to have it."

"Thank you," Will whispers, hoarse. He swallows, and puts the ring carefully back into the bag, and pushes it into his pocket. Then, he clears his throat, and tries to lighten the mood; "I can't give you the best man position, my friend has dibs on that, but you can walk with her down the aisle if Hannibal says 'Yes'."

It works; Elijah laughs. "If," he repeats, rolling his eyes. "Look, Will, I'll be the first to say I don't know a lot about relationships. But I know what it's like when you find the one. John was it for me, and I can see – I saw, when Hannibal looked at you – you're *it* for him. He loves you, anyone within a thousand-mile radius can see that."

Will smiles, flushing, and scuffs his shoes against the grass.

"I know," he replies, and he does know, he absolutely knows that, without a shadow of a doubt. He smiles at Elijah and, feeling indulgent, reaches for him, pulling him into a light,

familiar hug. Elijah sighs against him, forehead touching Will's shoulder, and hugs him back gently.

Will withdraws from him, and smiles, and then herds the dogs back into his car. "Thanks again!" he calls, and Elijah smiles and gives him a wave as he drives away.

Will fills the dogs' bowls and locks the kitchen door, before heading upstairs to dump his suitcase. He rinses off, not wanting Elijah's scent to cling to him when he goes to see Hannibal, and then he changes. He had exactly one suit in his possession when he first met Hannibal, but had bought a much more flattering one for Alana's wedding. The vest is a soft grey, blueish, and he pairs it with a pale blue tie, grinning to himself as he thinks of the similar one he soiled and left for Hannibal to find.

He puts a fine white shirt on, then the vest and tie. The rest of the suit is black, flattering – Hannibal went with him to the tailors and while most of the instructions were exchanged in fluent Italian, Will is sure Hannibal went out of his way to make sure Will's suit fit him well. Indeed, it sits perfectly on him, highlighting the broadness of his shoulders and the muscle in his thighs, tapers at his waist, clings to his biceps.

He brushes his hands through his hair, taming it from the wild, windswept mess it normally takes, and grabs his jacket, shrugging it on as he goes downstairs and out to his car. He turns it on, drives back to the main road, and towards the toll bridge, his chest alight with anticipation, and his teeth eager to fit Hannibal between them, to reclaim his mate once and for all.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal's home feels alive, as Will pulls up near it and parks his car. The other cars in the lot seem more a collection of the refined than usual, though he imagines people of Hannibal's wealth and status take cabs and limousines and whatever else they can manage. He's not sure if a horse-drawn carriage would actually surprise him or not.

He gets out of the car, his bottle of wine in hand, and hears music and laughter coming from within. He smiles to himself, head ducked down, feeling a familiar jitter running up his arms, but it is not nervousness. Rather, Will has spent so much of his life keeping people out, trying not to see too much, trying to protect his insight and his mind from those that would distract and pick at him. But Hannibal is an anchor, and Hannibal consumes Will's mind so thoroughly, he fights back the instinctive urge to flee, to hide.

He crosses the street, heads up the stairs, and tests the handle to find it locked. He frowns, tilting his head, and sighs, pressing on the doorbell.

There is a scatter of murmurs, and then the door unlocks, and Hannibal is there. He's dressed in a black suit as well, his vest and tie the color of drying blood – not quite brown, redder, to compliment his eyes and his tanned skin. And the golden wedding band on his finger.

Will meets his eyes, and knows why the door was locked, now. Hannibal wanted to see him, wanted to force them to interact and Will smiles, sly and wide, as Hannibal's gaze rakes down him brazenly.

Will steps close, and offers the bottle, and Hannibal takes it, his eyes flashing in recognition and a smile tugging at his lips as he realizes Will brought that kind that spanned the years of their courtship. "Doctor Lecter," Will greets, proper and aloof. "You're looking well."

Hannibal's expression is soft with joy, eyes bright with amusement, eager to play Will's newest game. "And you, Mister Graham. It's been too long," he purrs, and Will shivers, showing his teeth. "Please, come in."

Will enters, plastered to Hannibal in the small hallway. He shrugs off his coat, and hands it to Hannibal, whose fingers clench in it before he recovers, and hangs it in the coat closet. He locks the door behind Will and it feels like he's blocking the exits, so Will can't escape.

Which is perfectly fine; it means Hannibal cannot escape either.

Hannibal's hand flattens on his shoulder, and Will regards him with an arched brow, and wonders if Hannibal is this physically familiar with all his friends.

Hannibal smiles at him, and gestures towards the dining room. "This way, please," he says quietly. "You're the last to arrive."

Will hums, lifting his chin, and allows Hannibal to direct him to the dining room. Hannibal's hand falls away and Will enters, sees the table opulently set and decorated, the tablecloth maroon, offset by golden cloth placemats and shining silverware. There is a centerpiece of – he smiles – Birds of Paradise and Queen Anne's Lace. Everyone has a glass of water and of red wine at the top-right corner of their place settings, and there are eight people in total gathered around the extended table, four on each side.

Hannibal smiles as their attention is drawn to him. "My friends," he says, and touches Will's shoulder again, "our final guest has arrived. Please welcome Mister Will Graham. Will," he says, and nods to Will's chair, which is at the other end of the table, the second head.

Will smiles at him, and takes his seat. "Thank you," he says, and Hannibal's grin is infectious, he absolutely stinks of joy. Will cannot help but notice it's mostly women gathered around the table – and one Alpha and Omega, sitting on the left-hand side in the middle of their row of four, and one other Alpha sitting on Hannibal's right, two women between them. Shielding his scent, perhaps, as the room reeks of perfume. "It's wonderful to meet everyone."

On Will's left side sits an older woman, resplendent in pearls and a thin white dress, flapper-style. She has a headband breaking the sharp blackness of her hair, and grins at Will gummy-wide. "Pleasure to meet you, Mister Graham," she says, and offers her hand. Will smiles, and takes it, kissing her gloved knuckles, pleased to see her flush. "I'm Diane Komeda. How do you and Hannibal know each other?"

Will's smile widens, and he looks to his mate, sees him watching Will like he's ravenous. Will sits back, rubbing at his neck, which has the bruises and bites exposed by design, above the collar of his shirt. He can sense Hannibal's eyes, sharp on him.

He doesn't know what Hannibal might have told them, about his and Will's past, but her question is open and he senses no deception from her, so he gives a helpless shrug and shakes his head. "I worked for the FBI for a while," he tells her, repeating the story he fed Elijah; "Doctor Lecter consulted on a few of the cases I was the lead on. We became fast friends during that time."

"Oh, how interesting!" Diane says, and looks to Hannibal for confirmation. Hannibal smiles, straightening, and nods.

"I didn't know you consulted for the FBI, Hannibal," one of the Alphas says. He's an older gentleman, the kind that was likely very handsome in his day, but now has greying hair and a bulging stomach. Still, when he smiles, it's genteel, and his voice is high and soft.

Hannibal smiles at him. "I try to hold some mystery in my life, Russel," he says. As he speaks, a flock of white-dressed assistants emerge from the kitchen, each of them carrying two plates for the starting course. It's a salad, ripe with green leaves and pomegranate, flower petals and a rich lemon-colored drizzle. Will smiles, and stifles his laughter, realizing that the palette compliments what Hannibal claims he smells like.

He meets Hannibal's eyes, and smiles.

"Yes, the ever-mysterious Doctor Lecter," the Omega says, crooning the words. Will presses his lips together, eyeing the other man. "I wonder if we're ever going to meet the mystery husband, too. I simply must insist!"

Across from the Omega, another woman laughs. "Good luck," she says, as Hannibal takes his seat and gestures for them to begin eating. Will eats slowly, savoring the crisp freshness of the food, his eyes on Hannibal and Hannibal's eyes on him. "I've been trying to get him to reveal himself for *months*. He simply won't budge on the matter."

Hannibal breaks gazes with Will, and smiles at the woman. She reminds Will of Margot, with russet hair and wide, glassy eyes, and she looks very young – perhaps she is the daughter of one of the other guests, or a niece. Will cannot imagine how he knows her, otherwise.

"Alice," he says fondly, and shakes his head. "If only you were so keenly invested in your lessons as you are in my personal life."

The girl grins at him, and turns her attention back to her salad. Will clenches his free hand under the table, forces his voice to be politely interested when he asks; "Lessons?"

Alice smiles at him and nods. "Doctor Lecter is tutoring my sister and I regarding abnormal Alpha psychology," she says. Will blinks at her, head tilted as he regards his mate briefly. And then she smiles at Hannibal again, starry-eyed, so young and sweet and Will has to lower his gaze, lest he accidentally stab the table in a wayward strike of agitation.

"It sounds interesting," he says, tightly.

"Surely, Will, you are somewhat of an expert yourself," Diane says, either totally unaware or breezing past Will's bubble of tension. She smiles at him when he lifts his eyes. "Working for the FBI, hunting down evil men."

"I daresay Will is one of the most brilliantly insightful people I have ever met," Hannibal supplies, and Will looks to him. Looks at his hands, which are curled carefully around his silverware and his wine glass. Sees them tighten as Will watches. Lifts, as Hannibal swallows down a sip of wine. "He regularly astounds me with his keen eyes."

Diane laughs, teeth shining like her pearls. "Oh, Hannibal, be careful not to let talk like that reach your husband's ears!"

Hannibal smiles at her. "Perhaps you're right," he murmurs, and meets Will's eyes over his wine glass. He smiles, and Will's upper lip twitches in a barely-there growl. "I would hate for him to think he has anything less than my complete attention."

Will's chest tightens, his heart pounds, twice, in his throat, harsh enough he's sure Hannibal sees it. He drops his eyes, finishing his last bite of salad, and washes it down with a mouthful of the sweet, thick wine. The same kind Hannibal had in his office.

He tilts his head, smiling, when he remembers Hannibal calling him, sitting no doubt in that same chair, how he'd touched himself to Will's scent and begged for him so desperately. His

purr rumbles, swallowed back, and he sits back as one of the assistants comes forward to clear his plate, as well as the other guests'.

"It's a pity we haven't gotten to meet him," the woman sitting at Alice's left, Hannibal's right, says. She's a classical kind of beautiful, with waves of golden hair and the kind of face that Will is sure inspired art and statues of the muses. She speaks slowly, like every word is thoroughly dissected and pruned before she gives it life. She is wrapped in gold around her wrists, around her neck, and sits in a bare-shouldered dress, gold and black.

She turns her head, and fixes Hannibal with a closed-lipped, charming smile, and rests her chin on one hand, leaning close to him. She is familiar with him, Will can tell that much immediately, and Hannibal – well, Hannibal isn't leaning away. He accepts her into his personal space with ease, and Will swallows harshly, forcing his hand steady as he takes a sip of wine.

Hannibal notices, of course. He clears his throat and sits back in his chair, sipping at his wine as well – mimicking. He inhales when Will does, drinks when Will does. Will smiles, and sets his glass back down, and Hannibal follows suit. No one is looking at Will, their attention is on Hannibal completely, but Will thinks there could be a thousand people in this room and his eyes would still gravitate to Will.

"I couldn't imagine," the woman continues, "being set aside while my husband entertained his friends, not knowing who any of them were."

Hannibal's smile grows tight when he looks to her again. "Now, Bedelia, do you think I'm the kind of man who would not be eager to have him here, if he wished it?"

The woman – Bedelia – smiles again, more gently this time, as if she knows her words have incensed Hannibal and now seeks to calm him. She reaches out and pats his hand. "Of course not," she replies coolly. "It's simply out of character for you, Hannibal. You have a natural inclination for flair and theatrics."

At that, Hannibal laughs, as well as Diane, at Will's side. She claps her hands together. "Well said!" she crows. "I have so missed these parties of yours, Hannibal." She looks to Will, and leans in conspiratorially; "He used to throw such splendid parties, Mister Graham. Dinner and a whole show."

Will smiles, raising a brow. "'Used to'?" he repeats.

Diane huffs, rolling her eyes, and straightens with a teasing smile thrown Hannibal's way. "Yes. This husband of his has kept him positively *hermit*-like," she says. "We have scarcely seen him at any soiree since."

Will's other eyebrow joins the first, and he's not sure he should be feeling pride or guilt at the declaration. He certainly never meant to rob Hannibal of his friends, but Hannibal had never complained, and has always seemed eager to be at Will's side.

"He must be a remarkable man," he says, and looks to Hannibal again. Then, daring, he says; "Though I confess, I understand. Every evening I spend away from my mate feels like it

stretches on forever. I would not condemn a friend for succumbing to the same needs."

"Are you married, Will?" Bedelia asks, and looks at him like she deigns to. Will feels small, under her gaze, but meets her eyes placidly. "Or just mated?"

Just mated. Is that how the blue bloods of Baltimore see such things? Of course, marriage is universal, regardless of the genders and breeds of the two people. Mating is generally used to refer solely to Alpha-Omega pairs. Technically, being both Alphas, for Hannibal and Will to call each other 'mates' is not entirely correct.

But they are so much more than that, and isn't that the point?

He smiles at her, and shows his teeth. "Unofficially," he replies, and sees Hannibal straighten, his eyes widen when he looks at Will. Will presses his lips together, drums his fingers against his wine glass stem, and rolls his shoulders. "I haven't asked him yet."

Hannibal's shoulders seem to sag several inches, and his knuckles are white around his wine glass, and he looks at Will like Will hung the moon in the sky.

"Do you -?" He stops, clears his throat, and wets his mouth with wine. "Do you intend to?"

Will smiles, feeling savage, feeling strong. He thinks he can see, in Hannibal's eyes, a mirror of his own emotion, his own affection whenever Hannibal touches him, and *God*, what he would do to touch his mate right now. He's glad, for a moment, that Hannibal did not place him too close. He's sure such proximity would render them useless to all but each other.

"Yes," he purrs in reply, grinning as Hannibal swallows. "When we're both ready."

The assistants return with the main course, and more wine to refill everyone's glasses. Will looks down at the dish, the slices of pinked meat, red at the edges, and covered in a tart-smelling cranberry sauce, with a side of asparagus and a small mound of pineapple pieces covered in a thick glaze.

He lifts an eyebrow, gives Hannibal a questioning smile, and sees Hannibal flush, and nod.

"This looks delicious, Hannibal," Russel says. "What is it?"

"Pork in a Cumberland sauce," Hannibal replies.

He looks to Will again, and smiles. And Will knows it is definitely not pork.

He digs in eagerly, ravenous after only surviving on gas station food and hotel breakfasts. The meat is rich with flavor, the sauce a delicious, tart counterpoint when paired with the pineapple. It's so delicious, and it feels so good to be in on Hannibal's secret, he cannot help purring softly as he eats.

Hannibal must hear it, for his cheeks bear a delicate flush, and his smile is wide and proud whenever Will meets his eyes. Will returns his smile, blushing as he watches Hannibal take a bite of his food, watching his teeth graze the tines of his fork, his lips pressing together as he chews and swallows.

This is the heaviest meal they might have ever shared, and Will feels vibrant under his mate's full attention. There are other guests in the room, people who have known Hannibal as a friend and peer for far longer than Will, and yet Hannibal seems content to ignore them as they eat, his eyes, his attention, only on Will.

It's everything Will has ever wanted, and his smile is wide and sharp, cutting into his cheeks, as he finishes his plate.

"That was delicious, Hannibal," he purrs, and sits back with a contented sigh. "I shall have to accept your invitations more often."

Hannibal tilts his head, his eyes flashing, darkly pleased. "I'd like that, Will," he says.

Will flushes, his smile wide, soft fissures of heat running down his spine from being the sole focus of his mate's overwhelming attention. Hannibal's presence commands the room, smothers Will in place, and feels suffocating, all-consuming.

He shifts his weight, and rubs his hand along his thigh, across the pocket of his suit pants where the ring Elijah gave him sits, warmed by his flesh. He tilts his head, and clears his throat.

"Hannibal," he says, and Hannibal's eyes sharpen on him. "Where's your bathroom?"

Hannibal blinks, and nods to the door behind him. "Second door on the right," he replies, though Will already knows, of course. "Opposite the coat closet."

Will smiles, and stands. He leaves the room and heads to the bathroom, flicking on the light and the fan, and sucks in a deep breath. He runs his hands through his hair, eyes himself in the mirror – without his beard, the flush on his cheeks is starker, the bruises on his neck more obvious. He smiles at himself, and takes the ring from his pocket, and slides it into place on his finger. It's a good fit, just barely tugging at the skin on his knuckle, and settling into place like it was made just for him.

He flushes the toilet and washes his hands for the sake of politeness, and returns to the dining room, settling into place. He runs his left hand through his hair and Hannibal's eyes flash, widen. His nostrils flare, and he tilts his head.

Are you ready, my daydreamer?

Will's smile says; *Yes, Shadow Man.*

Hannibal clears his throat, and sets his knife and fork down. "My friends," he says, gaining the gathering's attention. "I confess, I have been somewhat false with you all, tonight."

Diane lets out a curious hum, and Bedelia's head tilts.

Hannibal smiles at them each, in turn, before his eyes land on Will. "I have brought you all together, here, as my friends, but there is someone at this table whom I hold in the highest regard, and who, until tonight, I kept secret from you."

The sharper ones at the table look to Will. Look to the wine in his hand, the glint of his wedding ring around his finger.

"Oh my God," Alice squeals, high and sweet. She cups both hands over her mouth, her eyes wide. "This is him, isn't it?"

Hannibal smiles at her. "Yes, my dear," he replies. "Everyone, I'd like to introduce you to my husband; Will Graham. The love of my life and, I hope, the newest friend to our happy troupe."

Bedelia blinks, straightening in her seat, and looks at Will with a new kind of scrutiny. Will smiles at her, sharp and wide, and takes a drink of wine.

Diane lets out a crow of delight, and rests her hand on Will's arm like a mother welcoming her child's first boyfriend to her home. "Oh, and what a fine match you both make," she says, grinning widely. Will smiles at her; in truth, he had expected some negative reaction from at least a few in the group, some conservative judgement or thinly-veiled contempt for Will, for who is he, to have won the regard of a man such as Hannibal?

But he sees it, now. He sees it, because Hannibal has shown it to him; Hannibal's regard is not a prize, for that implies some competition. Will was already the victor, the cornerstone and builder of Hannibal's hearth, and he won before the game even started.

"Of course," the Omega says, and Will looks at him, sees his eyes darting between Hannibal and Will with a heavy understanding. "It's so obvious, now."

Will huffs a laugh. "Is it?"

"Yes," the Omega says. And he smiles at Will, faint and fond. "He looks at you the same way he looks when he would speak to any of us about you. Now that I see it, it's the most obvious thing in the world."

Will flushes, but he's pleased to the bone, and when he looks at Hannibal, he sees his expression set into a similar display of joy.

The assistants come in for the third round; dessert. Will grins when he sees what it is; bites of thick, rounded shortbread, covered in a caramel and chocolate glaze. Hannibal had, it seemed, planned this entire dinner out with Will's taste, his scent, in mind.

He takes a drink of wine, and meets Hannibal eyes, and the rest of the night is lost to pleasant conversation and the taste of caramel in Will's mouth.

Diane is the last one to leave, and when she does, Hannibal walks her to the door and sees her safely into her taxi. She gives Will a kiss on the cheek before she leaves, and makes him promise not to be a stranger, before she waves at them both and the car drives away. Then, Hannibal rejoins him in the dining room. The assistants are still present, helping to clean and

put away the leftovers, set the dishes ready to be washed, and one woman comes to refill Will's wine glass before disappearing from sight.

Hannibal's purr draws Will's attention, and he lifts his head, smiling at his mate when Hannibal's hand flattens on his shoulder. Hannibal kneels beside him and Will tilts his head, lax with wine, and cups Hannibal's cheek with a lazy hand.

"That went well," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles, his scent thick with joy, as he cradles Will's hand and turns his head to kiss the meat of his thumb. He nudges his nose to the ring on Will's finger, and smiles.

"When did you get this?" he asks.

Will tilts his head, draws his hand away and holds it up, admiring the light glinting off the gold. "Elijah gave it to me," he says. Hannibal lets out a curious sound. "He told me anyone could see how in love we are, and he wanted me to have it, to give it to you." He smiles, and turns to regard Hannibal again. "But you already had one, so." He shrugs.

Hannibal stands, smiling, and takes Will's hand, kissing his knuckles. Will's fingers curl, and he smiles, rising to his feet.

Hannibal breathes out, warm and heavy, and presses his lips together. "I don't suppose you'll let me warm your bed tonight?" he asks.

Will smiles, turning his hand to cup Hannibal's jaw. "No," he replies, and Hannibal shivers, disappointment evident on his face, but it's a resigned kind, like he knew what Will's answer would be. "But I would like you to visit me, tomorrow night."

Hannibal lets out a weak, wanting sound, and he nods. Will smiles, and pulls him into a kiss that tastes of chocolate and thick wine, feels Hannibal tremble for him, feels Hannibal clutch at his flanks under his suit jacket, pulling him close.

Will pulls back, purring when Hannibal's lashes flutter, like he doesn't want to keep his eyes open, doesn't want to see Will leave. "Will you do something for me, Shadow Man?" he asks.

"Anything," Hannibal replies.

Will hums, and picks up his wine glass, nodding towards the study. "Play me a song?"

Hannibal swallows, and nods, taking Will's free hand and leading him to the study. Will follows, and settles down beside him on the bench in front of the harpsicord. Hannibal sucks in a breath, as though surprised by Will's proximity, and Will smiles at him, leans in and nuzzles his shoulder.

"Would you like to hear anything in particular?" Hannibal asks, his fingers trembling as they settle on the keys.

Will sighs, and closes his eyes. "Yes," he replies. "But I don't know what." He trusts Hannibal to know, for he always does.

Hannibal seems to consider this, before he takes a deep breath, lets it out, and starts to play. Will smiles as he hears the familiar high note, the beginning of their song that Hannibal played for him the first night they shared a meal. He opens his eyes, and watches Hannibal's fingers stretch between the keys, shivers as the song changes, becoming something new.

There's a vibrancy, here. An enticing melody woven between minor keys. Will straightens, allowing Hannibal free range of movement, and Hannibal takes his hands to the lower end of the notes, produces some pulsing, dark string of chords that make Will think of shadows, and monsters. Of being hunted.

Then, a sudden bright note – a flash of steel, the bared teeth of a warrior facing the dragon. His hands come together, meeting in the middle, discordant for a moment, then melting into harmony. It is the monster, and the King, circling each other and ready to strike. It is letters, back, forth, exchanging intimate secrets, talks of God and loneliness and pride.

A strike; white-hot, flashing behind Will's eyes as he slouches, tilts his head up, tries to breathe as the music swells, grows extra chords, extra notes, a chaotic blend of low and high, minor and major, sharps, sharps again, Hannibal's foot pressing the pedal that makes notes linger, and then releasing it, so they fade. The monster covers the King's notes, consumes them, draws them into itself and then the monster's chords change, grow wider as Will watches Hannibal play, watches his fingers stretch and dance across the keys.

Watches, as Hannibal closes his eyes, briefly, sucks in a breath, and then it all abruptly turns so gentle that Will gasps, and his eyes feel warm, and there's pressure in his skull. The monster is purring, soothing the aches and wounds it laid, covering its lover with leather and wine. It is the single high notes, simple breaths; moments of dawn and tender touches to cheeks and thighs.

It is a kiss, a vow. *A You have changed me, and I love that about you.*

Will wipes a hand over his mouth, fingers shaking, as the song grows claws again. The King takes up his sword, rebels against the monster's love, calls it a *mistake*, and vows to hunt it down and destroy it, and Will's tears fall, and he trembles, because the monster does not fight back. He sees it, in his mind's eye, a man of shadow and a man of gold, the monster reaching, burned in sunlight, but still reaching, despite its pain, despite its hunger.

Will reaches out, and covers Hannibal's hands. The last note lingers, and lingers, melancholy and long.

Will looks at Hannibal, sees his eyes dark, his face shadowed in low light, and he is exposed gold in a mountainside, flowing into Will's hands, trusting him to be gentle, and kind.

Will touches his face, turns him, and says, "Marry me."

Hannibal smiles, sweet with joy, and leans into Will, kisses him with utmost gentleness, his hand on Will's thigh for balance and Will shivers, accepts it, leans into it. He will not invite Hannibal to bed tonight, he still has one final thing he wishes to do, but oh, how he wishes he could.

They pull apart, and Will is breathless and fractured and Hannibal's liquid gold floods him, fills him, and he wonders if he's more the monster than the man, after this. "Marry me," he says again. "Take my name, take my heart, take everything you want from me."

Hannibal nuzzles him, his purr filling the room. "Nothing would please me more."

Will finds Franklyn with almost comical ease. He finds him in the cheese aisle, and pretends to reach for the same block, laughs it off with a sheepish, sweet air when Franklyn, wide-eyed at having the attention of a pretty Alpha on him, starts waxing poetic about Gouda. He lets Franklyn gravitate to him, lets his lashes lower and finds it almost sad how he's obviously mated, and has a wedding ring on his finger, and yet Franklyn, so desperate for affection, still lets Will flirt, lets him be unsubtle with scenting Franklyn.

Nods, eagerly, when Will suggests they continue this at Franklyn's house.

He kills him quickly, for he is merciful, and apparently only has the care within him to be cruel with Hannibal – with the type of men who can take it. He harvests Franklyn's sizable liver, his kidneys, and his heart, careful with leaving DNA or anything that could lead back to him, and leaves the rest for the police to find.

He drives back to Harrogate, and feeds the dogs and lets them out to frolic in the backyard. He leaves the back door open as he sets about preparing the meal for Hannibal.

He calls Hannibal as the oven preheats.

"Will?"

Will smiles. "Come by at seven," he says. "Not a moment sooner. Do you understand?"

Hannibal nods, the word a low growl when he replies; "Yes."

Will's smile widens, and he draws his eyes to his phone, which has Hannibal's name pulled up, and is on speaker. "When you arrive," he says, "you will need to dress in something comfortable. You will eat what I have laid out for you, and then you will try to find me."

"Find you?" Hannibal repeats, and he sounds dazed. Will isn't using his Voice, but it feels like he must be, for how obviously it's affecting Hannibal.

Will nods. "I'll be in the woods."

Hannibal snarls.

"I promised you a chase, didn't I?"

"Will, I -" Hannibal stops, and swallows, and Will hums, picking up his phone and taking Hannibal off speaker, pressing it to his ear as he unloads Franklyn's organs from the cooler

he'd brought.

Will smiles. "I think you'll like what I'm making," he murmurs. "I chose the meat special, just for you."

Hannibal's breath catches. Will imagines him in his office, or his study, his eyes wide and dark with contemplation. "What did you do?" he whispers, and sounds awed.

"He was a fat, happy pig," Will replies archly. "But all pigs must go to slaughter eventually."

Hannibal growls, the sound echoing into Will's ear, rattling around his head, and he closes his eyes, sighing, and braces himself on the kitchen counter. Counts his breaths, until his heart is steady again.

"I'll see you at seven," he murmurs, and then hangs up the phone, setting it down. He returns his attention to the organs – Googling what to make for liver and kidneys is innocuous enough, and he hums when he sees a recipe that he believes will suit.

It will require a trip to the store.

Sighing, he packs away the organs and puts them in the fridge, and washes his hands. He gets into his car after calling the dogs back inside, and heads over.

"Will!"

It's Deborah. She probably times these things.

But Will is a different man now, he feels it, coating him like a second skin, and wonders if this is how Hannibal feels when he dons his person suits.

He smiles at her, and greets her with a nod as they both grab a cart each and head inside. "I have the baking dish Hannibal brought over," she tells him. "You both left in such a hurry, I do hope everything's alright!"

Will winces, remembering that night. The raw ache of it. His merciless cruelty to his mate that stings like salt on an open wound. "Yes, I'm sorry," he says, running a hand through his hair. "I was called away for a, a work thing."

"I can imagine," Deborah replies, trusting because she has no reason not to be. She hums a little off-key tune to herself as Will leads the way, towards the section of the store where there are breadcrumbs and cooking oil.

As he reaches for a box, Deborah's eyes widen and she lets out a little chirp of delight. "Oh!" Will's eyes follow her, to the wedding ring still sitting on his finger. He'd quite forgotten it was there, for it feels as natural as being with Hannibal is, one more inevitable pinnacle of conquest and claim between them both.

Will gives her a kind, sheepish smile, playing the part of blushing husband well. "I proposed last night," he tells her.

"Oh my, that's wonderful!" she says, and pats his arm in a motherly way. He thinks she and Diane would be great friends, if the bay and several zeroes behind their worth didn't separate them. "How did you do it? Oh, Malcolm was so *romantic* when he proposed to me. He took me out to the lake, and there was starlight and candles everywhere, it was *wonderful*."

Will smiles, for it paints a lovely scene. "He's more theatrical than I am," he admits. "I simply asked."

Deborah fixes him with a playfully stern look. "Will, hon, that is *no* way to propose to anyone! We must celebrate – oh, I'll tell the church! We can throw a party for you. It'll be so much fun, and don't bother arguing, I will have the word out by the end of the night."

Will rolls his eyes, but knows better than to dissuade her. "How can I say 'No'?" he murmurs with a shrug. He rolls his cart farther down the aisle, gathers some cooking oil, and heads to the next, Deborah in tow. "And I'm sure he will insist on having you and Malcolm over for dinner at some point, as a 'Thank you'."

"We'd be delighted, just name the time," Deborah says, grinning wide. "Well, I won't keep you. You have the look of a man on a mission. Congratulations, Will!"

"Thank you," he replies, and watches her go, strangely warm with affection for this strange, happy woman who has so eagerly welcomed Will into her life, as if he were her own son. Small-town folk are so *weird*.

He shakes it off, and gathers the rest of his supplies. He buys fresh strawberries, and long-grain rice, and asparagus, and rosemary as well as other spices, and laughs to himself, thinking of the first time he'd come to this store and bought little more than coffee, beer, and canned goods. How things change.

You have changed me, and I love that about you.

He returns home, freeing the dogs once again, and sets about his work.

It's six forty-five, and Will is pouring wine. He sets a place for Hannibal, the breaded and fried slices of kidney in a warming tray, on a thick bed of risotto, with a serving spoon. Beside it, in the same tray, thin-sliced pieces of Franklyn's liver, cooked in red wine until it has a lustrous glaze.

The heart, he didn't cook. He leaves it raw, and sliced it open, and within it he has planted sunflowers, Amaryllis, and Queen Anne's Lace.

Amaryllis; splendid beauty, and worth beyond beauty. Queen Anne's Lace for sanctuary and complexity. The sunflowers, representing pure thoughts, adoration, and dedication. He knows Hannibal will recognize them for what they are, will know, because he sent Will these same flowers, decorated his dinner table with them, and he knows what they will mean.

He locks the dogs in the kitchen, feeding them what he did not cook as well as their regular food, and then returns to the main part of the house. He takes his notebook and tears a page free, sitting down, wary of the time;

"Shadow Man,

I offer you, in reward for your dedication, this humble meal. I want to sate you, in body, in mind, and in soul, and I am so sorry for my cruelty, so sorry that that is the only way I know to express my love. Tonight, I will lay claim to every part of you. I will brand you, and bite you, and prove myself to you.

You have given me not just awareness, not just insight and knowledge. Knowing who you are, and knowing what you are, that was only part of the puzzle. I see that now. Knowing myself, not just what you made me but what I am, at my core – that part was harder. But I see now. I see, and I understand.

You have changed me, and I love you for that.

Eat, drink. Make yourself at home, and when you are ready, come find me."

He folds the paper in half, and weighs it down under the knife and fork he sets at the right side of the plate.

Then, he stands, and goes to his bedroom. He sheds his jeans and replaces them with sweatpants, exchanges his boots for running shoes, and he leaves.

There is no witch in the woods. There is just Will, and soon, Hannibal.

He bolts for the trees as he hears Hannibal's car approach, a smile on his face and joy guiding his way.

The night is dark, and it is cold, but Will burns with a fire that keeps him warm as he runs, panting, through the trees. He does not hear, yet, the sounds of pursuit, but he will, soon. He knows he will. Hannibal has been denied his body, his touch, for too long to let him linger here, in the darkness, alone.

There is a difference between being alone and being lonely. The leaves brush him, scattered and wet on the ground and some still clinging stubbornly to their branches. The trees snap at him, bramble stinging his exposed face and neck, and he runs until he is exhausted, past that. He runs until his knees give out, but he forces himself to keep moving, and the woods feel endless, expansive, and the moon shines on him just bright enough to see by despite the close-knit canopy, and the air is sweltering with humidity, and makes him sweat.

He spreads his scent, hands, cheeks brushing leaves. When his palms bleed, he smears his blood on whatever he touches, moss-covered stone and crackling branches. He runs until sweat blinds him, runs until his lungs ache and his mouth is dry.

He crests a hill, and comes to a stop. In front of him, glittering under the moon and dotted with starlight, there is a lake. Will smiles, ears keenly tuned to any sounds of heavy feet behind him, as he slows, and approaches the lake. He crouches down, and dips his hands in the clear, icy water, bringing it to his mouth to drink. He does it again, gasping at the chill as it races behind his chest, shivers, and stands again, no longer quite so thirsty.

A branch snaps, and Will tilts his head. It sounded far away.

Will returns to the trees, in a different spot, knowing Hannibal is following his scent. He prowls between them, the moon his guide, his friend, and he settles down in a thick cluster of bushes, and waits.

He doesn't have to wait long.

Hannibal emerges in a shaft of moonlight, his eyes glowing a brilliant red. His chest is bare, shining with sweat, thinly marked with the lashes of branches. He's bleeding, one thin line over his heart, grazes on his shoulders and arms. He's breathing heavily, lips parted, scenting the air, chin lifting. He looks like a predator, like a monster.

Will doesn't think he's looked any more beautiful.

Hannibal growls, knees bent, shoulders hunched, as he walks through the trees, commanding, assured. But Will is assured, too, and confident. He matches his stride to Hannibal's, keeps his eyes not on Hannibal's back, where he will be sensed, but just shy of him, dulling his keen perception. When Hannibal's foot lands, so does his. When Hannibal pauses, head tilted to listen, Will freezes in place, using the darkness and the trees as shelter.

Hannibal reeks of victor-scent, it coats Will's tongue and the roof of his mouth and he stifles a snarl, knowing Hannibal is pleased with his offering. His belly is full of Will's kill, his mouth coated with Will's offering of wine, his mind set aflame by Will's words.

Hannibal approaches the lake, exposed to the cool wind and any predator's watchful gaze, but there is only Will, and there is only Hannibal.

Neither of them alone, anymore.

This is Will's design, his perfect design; to lure the monster out, to the final battleground. To rend him apart and devour his flesh. To cradle his heart and bite it, still-beating. To look into Hannibal's eyes and see himself as Hannibal sees him; a monster in his own right. A triumphant, venerated equal.

He emerges, silently, from the trees, footsteps light and quick behind Hannibal. Hannibal tenses, and turns, and Will snarls, catches him at the shoulders and forces him to face forward, towards the lake.

"Be still," he says, using his Voice, compelling Hannibal's obedience. It occurs to him, not for the first time, that Hannibal has rarely ever used his own Voice on Will. Perhaps it is his need for consent, perhaps he has been too-aware, all this time, of the power and control he exerts

over Will. And Will knows he doesn't need to use his, but there's something intoxicating about the way Hannibal sags for him, shivers for him, when he does.

"Kneel," he commands, teeth at Hannibal's ear, and Hannibal falls to his knees immediately, a soft growl spilling from his lips as Will cups his neck and steps up behind Hannibal, his thighs to Hannibal's back. He cradles Hannibal's face, digs his fingers gently to the exposed bite marks and bruises he placed there, and turns his gaze to the lake.

Will kneels behind him, brings Hannibal to rest on his ankles, and remains upright, on his knees. He leans down, kisses Hannibal's exposed throat, feels him shiver, watches his eyes close, his jaw flex, his fingers curl.

Will smiles, nuzzling his mate's sweaty hair. "Did you like the food I prepared for you?" he whispers.

Hannibal nods, swallowing harshly, a weak growl rumbling in his chest. "Franklyn was a fine choice," he replies, and turns his head, seeking Will's mouth. Will feels indulgent, and kisses him, chaste and soft, before he pulls back.

"You knew it was him," he says with a smile.

"Omegas have a certain flavor," Hannibal replies. "And I knew he, most of all, had caused the greatest slight against you."

Will hums, brushing his hands down Hannibal's back, to his hips. He pulls Hannibal against him, lets Hannibal feel how hard he is, how desperately he wants him, and Hannibal shivers, with cold, with need, and bows his head when Will kisses his neck again.

"Do you see me as an avenging angel?" he asks.

Hannibal shakes his head. "I see you as mine."

Will smiles. "And you are mine," he whispers, and curls his fingers in Hannibal's waistband – he's wearing sweatpants, like Will is, and Will purrs at the appropriate choice. He pushes them down, exposing Hannibal's cock, his hips, the tops of his thighs to the cold air, and presses his hands to fever-warm, flushed skin when Hannibal tenses with anticipation.

"I want to own you," Will breathes, because he knows how much Hannibal delights in hearing him talk like that. "In every way. Will you let me?"

Hannibal turns his head, meets Will's eyes, and smiles. "See for yourself, my daydreamer."

Will blinks, brow creasing, and he pulls back, pulls a hand back, and snarls when he drags his fingers between Hannibal's thighs, finds him wet and open, finds him slick, stretched already, ready for Will.

"You knew I wanted this," he says.

"I knew I wanted *you*," Hannibal replies in a whisper. "Whatever way you'll have me."

Will snarls, and pulls his clothes back into place. He rises, and circles Hannibal, and tugs him to his feet. Kisses him, rough and harsh, and Hannibal moans, cupping his shoulders, nails digging in.

Will pulls back, knows he's showing his red, sees it reflected in Hannibal's eyes, and he smiles, and commands; "Run."

Hannibal's nostrils flare, he growls, showing his teeth, but he pushes Will back, forcing them to part, and turns tail towards the trees. Will laughs, and gives chase. Hannibal is strong, and he's fast, but in the same way greyhounds are fast: prone to quick bursts of speed, but ultimately useless over long distances. Will has soccer games, and street chases, and years of running himself ragged to have built up his endurance.

He catches Hannibal as the lights of his house are visible in the distance, between the trees. He lunges for his mate, bites him savagely at the neck, and throws Hannibal to the ground. Hannibal snarls, the red in his eyes glinting, and when he tries to rise Will covers him, wraps a hand around his throat and works his other hand under Hannibal's clothes, fisting his cock tightly.

Hannibal moans, going still in surrender. Will can feel the hammer of his pulse, the heave of his chest against Will's own, and he kisses his mate, steals his air – if he is weak, he cannot run. He lets go of Hannibal's cock, yanks his sweatpants down and kneels on them, below the knees, so that Hannibal can spread his thighs, but cannot fight free.

He shoves his own clothes down, out of the way, freeing his cock, and strokes himself once, snarling at how close he already is. He won't last long, he's sure, denied for his whole life the knowledge of what being inside someone will feel like, and he imagines Hannibal blister-hot, desperate, clenching up for him.

He kisses Hannibal again, feeds him clear lake water and blood shed by Will's teeth, and he pushes Hannibal's thighs apart, releasing Hannibal's neck to do so, and holds him still, holds him steady. Hannibal reaches for him, clawing at Will's arms, his shoulders, the scratched surface of his neck.

"Will," he breathes, and Will shudders at the raggedness, the rawness, of his voice. "Darling, please."

Will cannot resist. He's helpless, flayed to the bone. He leans down, digs his nails into the dirt, into the wet leaves, and guides his cock between Hannibal's legs. Ruts, impatient and wet, against his slick hole, and then pushes in with a snarl.

Hannibal tenses immediately, dragging his nails harshly down Will's back, and Will rears up, pulling his sweater and shirt over his head, throwing them to one side. Hannibal immediately claws at him, snarling, his thighs tight around Will's hips and Will fucks in, sinks deep, and bites Hannibal's neck hard enough to draw blood.

Hannibal is *tight*, so fucking tight around him, hot as an inferno, and he spasms when Will bites him, eagerly clinging to Will's nape, his shoulders, his hair as Will fucks him brutally. Will's hand finds his hip, angles him up as Hannibal does with him so effortlessly. Hannibal's

erection slides between their bellies and Hannibal is purring, vocal with his pleasure as Will fucks him.

"Oh my *God*," Will growls, his teeth wet with Hannibal's blood. He fucks in, driving as deep as he can, closes his eyes to feel the chill of the night air, the searing heat of Hannibal's hands on his exposed skin, the cling of his sweat-damp thighs and the tight, *God*, so tight clench of Hannibal's muscles around him. He lifts his head, cups Hannibal's neck, and pulls him up for a desperate kiss that works a rough snarl of pleasure from Hannibal's lungs.

It feels too good, claiming Hannibal like this. The taste of his blood, his sweat, his sweet mouth full of the flavors of Will's dinner. His knot is swelling already, itching at the back of his neck, commanding he press deep and go still, compelling him to flood his mate so full that Hannibal leaks.

Hannibal moans, nails at Will's flanks, and then one hand drops, wrapping around his cock, and Will snarls, and bites him in punishment.

"Don't you dare," he commands, using his Voice to be sure he's obeyed. Hannibal whines, and it's such a needy sound, and he doesn't stop touching himself but Will knows he won't finish until Will lets him – and Will is drunk on the feeling of knowing he commands Hannibal's every action, in the darkness, in their shared monstrosity.

Hannibal kisses him, comparatively gentle, letting Will rut and bite and mount him like a wild beast. "How does it feel, my daydreamer?" he whispers, voice rough from moaning, from snarling. He cups Will's nape, tightens up for him.

Will can barely form coherent thoughts, let alone speak them. "Good," he grunts, pulling from Hannibal's mouth and instead rubbing his forehead against Hannibal's cheek, his jaw, his bloody neck. It smears, iron-rich and so, so warm, and Will licks over his collarbone, gathering more into his mouth. "You feel so fucking good, *God*, I can't -."

He takes Hannibal's hand from his cock, left in left, ring against ring, and guides Hannibal's hand to his neck, making him dig in, tighten both hands in Will's nape. He puts his hands on Hannibal's heaving ribs, falls against him, falls into him, and stutters, goes still, the heat in his spine rushing down, lit and sparked to life when Hannibal kisses him.

He pulls out, gasping, and wraps a hand around his knot as his orgasm overwhelms him. He spills, hot and wet, over Hannibal's stomach, over his chest. Over his flushed cock. Then, he slides back in, hisses at the spasm of Hannibal's sore muscles – he knows how it feels to get fucked for the first time, knows the heat and soreness of it. He finishes with a gasp, shallow enough that he knows Hannibal will leak here, too, stained and marked inside and out.

"*Fuck*," he moans, and lets go of his knot. His body twitches, tightens, tricked into getting so close to knotting his mate, he keeps coming, like he's locked inside of Hannibal, and it aches, it aches, *God*. He whimpers as Hannibal pets him, purrs, soothing, but it's not enough, it's not -.

He shoves Hannibal's thighs down, pulls himself free of his dirty sweatpants, soaked at the knees, and climbs into Hannibal's lap. He hauls him upright, kisses him, and wraps a hand

around Hannibal's dirty cock. There's so much seed on him, he stinks of Will, utterly, and Will needs him.

He pushes Hannibal's cock between his legs, moaning when Hannibal's hands tighten on his hips; warning, unsure. Will isn't stretched, isn't slick on the inside, but he doesn't care, can't find it in him to care, and he's eager for his mate. Hannibal is a master at coaxing Will's muscles into pliancy, and Will is nothing if not stubborn.

He forces Hannibal's cock inside him, breath hitching, makes himself go lax as he sinks down and trembles. Hannibal grunts, snarling, his teeth on Will's neck as Will's thighs touch his, and his hips roll, and he sighs, sated to the bone at being able to smell himself on Hannibal. The tackiness of his seed makes their thighs slick together, it's filthy and wet and Will is sweating, and Hannibal is sweating, and he rolls his hips again, shuddering when he feels the bulge of Hannibal's knot, seeking entrance.

"Please," he gasps, smearing Hannibal's blood along his cheek, cups his face and kisses him harshly. He works his hips down, needing it, needing more, and chokes on his inhale as Hannibal snarls, and goes still, digging his nails to Will's hips hard enough to bruise as he forces Will down, forces him to take his knot, and trembles with his orgasm.

Will whimpers, can't find air, can't find warmth, and Hannibal pulls him close and rolls him onto the pile of Will's sweater and shirt. It causes his knot to sink in, to lock properly, and Will gasps, shaking at the feeling of it. He warms Hannibal's back with his hands, his hips with Will's thighs, and clings to him as Hannibal covers him, his purr loud and satisfied, his nose in Will's sweaty hair.

Will shakes for him, tightens his sore body around Hannibal's cock just to hear him growl, and lifts his head, meeting his mate's red eyes. He cups Hannibal's neck, breathes in the heavy scent of them both, slicks his thighs along Hannibal's stained hips, and could not stop his sated purr even if he wanted to.

His eyes are wet, mouth flooded, when Hannibal kisses him again and drinks down his soft sigh. "Do you forgive me, Shadow Man?" he whispers.

"There is nothing to forgive," Hannibal replies, and he's so warm, so heavy, so undeniably strong as he covers Will and nuzzles him. "You have made me happier than I dared dream I could be. Every moment with you is ecstasy."

Will purrs, huffing, and leans up for another kiss. Hannibal growls, rolls his hips, as his knot goes down, and they can separate. He gathers their clothes and Will rises, trembling and coltish, and leans against Hannibal's chest in an effort to fight off the chill.

Hannibal cups his neck, and kisses him. "Let me take you home, my daydreamer," he purrs.

Will smiles, and nods.

"You're getting married?!"

Will huffs a laugh. "That is what I just said, yes," he replies. He smiles down at his lap, idly switching his phone to his other hand so he can look at the wedding ring around his finger. He'll take it off, for the actual ceremony, but he likes the look of it, and loves how Hannibal's eyes flash and darken with pleasure when he sees Will wearing it.

Hannibal has taken to wearing his, too, even when he visits.

"Don't worry," Will adds. "We'll wait until you're back from Paris."

"You're damn right you're waiting! I'm your best man, aren't I?"

"Well..."

"William Shannon Graham, I had *better* be your best fucking man!"

Will laughs. "Alana, please," he says, grinning. "Of course you're gonna be my best man. Or best woman, I guess. I'm not *insane*."

"Debatable," Alana huffs in reply, but Will can tell she's smiling. "Oh my God, this is so exciting. I can't believe it – my friend Will, ever the bachelor, finally tying the knot. I'm gonna cry."

Will winces. "Please don't," he begs her, still playful but also very much genuinely concerned that she will, in fact, start crying. "I already have to deal with one hopeless romantic, I cannot deal with both of you."

"You're just jealous of people that have genuine emotions, you robot," Alana says, and her voice is thick, so supremely happy.

Will rolls his eyes, and lifts his head when he hears Hannibal's car approaching. "He's here," he breathes, alight with joy. "I'll call you later."

"I'm going to take Margot shopping, so we can pick out bridesmaids' dresses! Oh, I have to text Hannibal too, God knows he'll probably be planning most of it. We'll have to figure out color schemes, and a *theme*. Okay, bye!"

"Bye," Will replies, huffing again when the call ends before he can really form the word. He supposes it's for the best; he can let Alana and Hannibal have their fun planning. Will has never been one for grand romantic gestures, unless it's Hannibal he's receiving them from, and even then, anything more than chocolate or wine seems a little much.

But it's a wedding. People go all out for weddings. He can bear one day.

He smiles, setting his phone down as Hannibal enters the house. Winston and Addy trot up to him, tails wagging, and he smiles, bending down to give them both cursory pets before he straightens, removing his coat. Will takes it from him, and hangs it on the rack by the door.

Hannibal turns to him, smiling, cups his face and kisses him. Will sighs, and is smiling when they pull apart.

"Alana's already picking out dresses," he tells Hannibal, following him to the kitchen as is customary, when Hannibal brings food. He also, Will notes, has the bottle of wine Will brought to the dinner party that they never opened.

Hannibal grins. "She is an exuberant and bright soul," he says, setting the bottle and his cooler down. He turns to Will, looks him up and down, and clears his throat. "It need not be an extravagant affair, if you'd prefer."

Will rolls his eyes, waving the concern away. "Please, go nuts," he replies. "I'd never dream of denying you the chance to plan a party."

Hannibal smiles, pleased and bright-eyed. "I shall have to invite my regular host of friends," he says. "I'd never hear the end of it, otherwise."

Will hums, and approaches his mate, turns him and plants him against the counter, leans in, but hesitates before they kiss. Hannibal's eyes flash, impatient. Will smiles, and kisses him once, chastely, but pulls back before Hannibal can deepen it.

"Invite whoever you want," he purrs. "I'm sure you've waited a lifetime to show me off."

Hannibal huffs, grinning wide, showing his teeth. "I confess it happily," he says, amiable, in a good humor. His eyes rake Will up and down, assessing something Will isn't aware he's showing. He shifts his weight, steadies his stance, and leans back against the counter without Will forcing him there.

Will's head tilts, and his eyebrows rise. He smiles. "Something on your mind, sweetheart?"

"You," Hannibal replies, openly. "Always."

Will hums, and leans back against the opposite wall, folding his arms across his chest. He lifts his chin, showing his neck, smiling when Hannibal's eyes drop to the bruises and bites along his throat. "Any particular train of thought?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "No," he replies. "You have consumed me, in my entirety." Will shivers, bites his lower lip, digs his nails into the innards of his elbows.

He swallows, and lets his eyes go half-lidded. "And you make a fine meal," he replies. Hannibal swallows, folds his arms as well, mimicking. This is what they are, equals, not in competition, but in completion, filling each other's crevices and fractures with liquid gold.

Hannibal smiles. "Are you hungry, darling?"

"Mm, ravenous," Will replies. He turns his head, tilts it, and eyes the back door that leads to the stretch of green, the darkening eclipse of the trees shielding them from the light of the setting sun, coloring the sky pink and orange.

"And what may I offer, to sate your hunger?"

Will smiles, wide and slow, until he shows his teeth. He pushes himself from the wall by his shoulders, unfolds his arms and slides close to Hannibal again. Lets their chests touch, when Hannibal drops his arms. Lets his lips find Hannibal's jaw, his cheek, the bridge of his nose.

Finally, his mouth, and he tugs Hannibal from the counter and turns him, his back to Will's chest, facing the door.

He puts his teeth to Hannibal's nape, snarls lowly just to feel his mate shiver, and lets go.

"Show me your heart," he whispers, and takes a step back. Hannibal tenses, fingers flexing, and looks at Will over his shoulder. Will smiles, savage, feral, and nods to the door. "Run, Shadow Man."

Hannibal growls, his eyes flashing, and he obeys, striding through the back door with confidence, and out into the yard. Will watches him, breath caught in his throat, the desire heating his spine to follow, to chase.

He waits until Hannibal is in the trees, until they open for him, welcoming and dark with shadows. Then, he begins his hunt.

Chapter End Notes

I really want to thank Luc (maydei) for their shameless encouragement and support, as well as all my fellow Hannigram writers, and everyone who left comments/kudos on Shadow Man and helped me gain the traction and support I needed to finish this. I am nothing without you guys, and I love you all a lot.

I'll catch you in the next fic!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!